

**MAKING QUEER ANTI-CAPITALIST RESISTANCE INTELLIGIBLE:
READING QUEER CHILDHOOD IN THE RUINS OF NEOLIBERALISM**

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ABSTRACT

In challenging normative social relations, queer cultural studies has shied away from deploying historical materialist theoretical tools. My research addresses this gap by drawing these two literatures into conversation. I do so by investigating how global economic relations provide an allegorical and material context for the regulation, representation and re-imagining of working-class queer childhood through anti-capitalist queer readings of three films: *Kes*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Boys Village*. I deploy this reading practice to investigate how these films represent heteronormative capitalism's systematic extermination of the life possibilities of working class children, how children resist forces of normalisation by creating queer times and spaces, and how nostalgia engenders a spatio-temporal understanding of queerness through a radical utopianism. My analysis foregrounds visual cultural productions as sites for understanding how contemporary social worlds exclude queer working class children, who struggle to insert themselves into and thereby shift the grounds of normative social relations.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

I graduated with an Honours BA degree in 2009. In Dickensian form, “it was the worst of times” due to the global economic slump of 2007-2008, which created the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression of 1929. My interest in understanding social phenomena drew me to consider the dynamics and effects of this crucial event of the 21st century. I was less interested in the decline of global economic growth and its possible politico-economic implications at national, international and transnational levels, and more moved by newspapers that were replete with stories of human misery caused by the crisis: people in North America evicted from their homes by the merciless imperatives of neoliberal capitalism; intensified global increases in the rates of homelessness, suicide, unemployment, hunger and death. When no significant attempts had been made to make these people’s lives more livable, these conditions of suffering suggested that many people were not considered human beings by the majority of macro socio-political institutions. I began to understand the problem highlighted by this economic crisis to be inadequately framed as the decline of global economic growth and its outcomes. This crisis seemed to question the very way we conceptualize what it means to be human and what constitutes the worth of a human being.

People of colour, indigenous people, working classes, immigrants, women, children, and sexual minorities have often experienced this global slump in a more severe fashion than those who have occupied privileged positions in the course of

history, i.e. those who have traditionally been perceived as normative *human beings*. In order to concretely grapple with this unjust ontology, my concerns about global socio-economic inequality and its uneven effects on different groups of people have developed into an interest in examining its sociological expressions, processes and outcomes. Therefore, the question of what constitutes the human in her/his concreteness preoccupied me during my MA coursework. A crucial scholar in the development of queer theory, Judith Butler, shares this preoccupation: “I would like to start, and to end, with the question of the human, of who counts as the human, and the related question of whose lives count as lives, and with a question that has preoccupied many of us for years: what makes for a grievable life?”¹ Butler’s investigations² of this question led me deeply to engage with queer theory.

Queer theory challenges the metaphysical and dualist foundations of traditional Western philosophy, and draws on feminist, Foucauldian, and lesbian and gay studies to criticize the violent processes of normalization and to open up spaces for non-normative social ontologies. The goal of queer theory is to make livable lives for all by “render[ing] the previously unintelligible intelligible.”³ In so doing, queer projects “centre on an effort to open up spaces for the ‘human’ to exist, possibly to thrive.”⁴

¹ Judith Butler, “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” in *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 17-18.

² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, (London and New York: Verso, 2004); *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).

³ Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 134.

⁴ Ibid.

While the general framework of queer studies foregrounds sexuality in its complex relations to other spheres of social life, the main question addressed by queer theorists is: “how does the constitution of lesbian/gay, or ‘homosexual’ identity contribute to the power/knowledge regimes through which all persons become constituted in this culture?”⁵ This question often ignores the importance of economic regimes as crucial aspects of culture, and under-theorizes how sexual and gender regimes are also implicated in the spheres of race, nationalism, indigeneity, immigration, and disability.⁶ In other words, even though queer theory provides useful analytical frameworks for thinking about the possibilities of alternative social ontologies, it often disregards the economic in its analyses. Consequently, the political project of imagining, theorizing and creating alternative social ontologies remains incomplete. My theoretical concern in this thesis is to examine how subjectivity is constituted through the articulation of different forms of power and knowledge – especially of the sexual and the economic.

In this thesis, I investigate the ways in which global economic relations provide an allegorical and material context for the regulation, representation and re-imagining of working-class queer childhood through anti-capitalist queer readings of *Kes* (dir. Ken Loach, 1969), *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000), and *Boys Village*, (dir. Till

⁵ William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 130.

⁶ Ian Barnard, *Queer Race: Cultural Interventions in the Racial Politics of Queer Theory*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); John Charles Hawley (ed.), *Post-colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Qwo-Li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley and Scott Lauria Morgensen (eds.), *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, (Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 2011); Robert McRuer and Ellen Samuels (eds.), *Desiring Disability: Queer Theory Meets Disability Studies*, a special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol: 9, Issue: 1/2.

Kleinert 2011). My overarching aim in this thesis is to explore how economic, sensuous, political and affective relations simultaneously constitute social ontologies. I investigate this admittedly large question through a focus on queer cultural productions as sites through which to critique contemporary social worlds and reimagine them otherwise. I take as my central text the short film *Boys Village*, an evocative and finely crafted movie that invites viewers to question taken-for-granted ideas about space, class, gender, sexuality and childhood in the post-war landscape of Britain.

When I first saw *Boys Village* at the 22nd annual *Inside Out* Toronto LGBT Film Festival, I was struck by its aesthetic beauty and cinematographic competence. I then began to think about the film more deeply, and wanted to know the history of its setting. I learned that St. Athan Boys Village – also known as the Miner’s Welfare Fund District Committee Seaside Camp – was first opened for an experimental two-week period in 1925. Because of the ongoing construction of the camp and the General Strike of 1926, the official opening was delayed until 1930.⁷ St. Athan Boys Village occupies an important place in the collective memory of Wales, as “a place for the poorest boys of the mining community to take a week’s summer holiday, a chance to be children again.”⁸ According to Victoria Richards, it “is the only known monument to a unique experiment aimed at giving teenagers a respite from doing the work of men, six days a week, in the filthy *blackness* of their country’s coal mines.”⁹ These representations

⁷ The Derelict Miscellany, <http://derelictmisc.org.uk/boysvillage.html>, accessed July 18, 2012.

⁸Victoria Richards, “The Lost Boys of St. Athan,” *The Independent*, November 28, 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-lost-boys-of-st-athan-2145639.html>, accessed July 18, 2012.

⁹ Richards, “The Lost Boys of St. Athan” (emphasis is mine)

depict St. Athan Boys Village as deeply linked to working-class communities and their politics. In addition to its classed history, Boy's Village was founded at a time when racialized discourses on the Welsh were predominant in the United Kingdom.¹⁰

Using the poetic language of nostalgia, my treatment of *Boys Village* explore the story of a queer working-class boy who lives in the context of neoliberal capitalism. The film provides me with a suggestive cultural site with which to explore the representation of economic and queer lives and the ways in which they are made 'livable' or 'unlivable'. The film and its material history allow me to bring together an anti-capitalist critique and queer theory to unpack the seemingly separate relations of class, sexuality, gender and race in *Boys Village*, and through this analysis to imagine more equitable and sensuous social ontologies.

Even though queer analytical frameworks are not hostile to socio-economic analysis of the social world, many queer theorists have not paid enough attention to the economic sphere of social life. This is partly due to the "polarizing mutual skepticism" between Marxism and queer studies that

has a number of more or less mediated causes, including, for example, the well-worn tendency of much Marxist analysis to reduce issues of gender and sexuality to mere symptoms of a privileged economic base, or the more recent influence of Foucault's relatively

¹⁰ Mostyn Davies, a member of the management committee of Boys Village from the 1960s onwards, tells in an interview for BBC: "if you went outside of Wales, particularly in the 60s and 70s of my experience as a youngster, and you say 'oh, I come from Wales' the image that people in England had about Wales was little, dark people who used to go in mines... They had this vision of Wales being a dark mining hole."

Audio Slideshow: St. Athan Boys' Village, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/8701858.stm, BBC News, accessed July 18, 2012.

anti-Marxist project on queer theory's early development, an influence difficult to overestimate.¹¹

This separation between the sexual and the economic, and more specifically the economic in the analysis of the sexual, is apparent in many studies of queer cultural productions. A cursory look at the index of several influential queer texts on cultural productions demonstrates this continuing disconnect between the sexual and the economic in the analysis of queer film and video.¹² The bibliographic citations in these books, irrespective of their political inclination, are also devoid of references to the work of economic theorists. Only Thomas Waugh's book, *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, has several entries for class, capitalism, neoliberalism, working-class and commodification.

Despite the lack of a genuinely interconnected analysis of economic and sexual regimes in cultural studies, there have been invaluable studies of this matrix in the

¹¹ Kevin Floyd, "Making History: Marxism, Queer Theory, and Contradiction in the Future of American Studies," *Cultural Critique*, No. 40, (Autumn, 1998):168.

¹² Thomas Peele (ed.), *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Samuel A. Chambers, *The Queer Politics Of Television*, (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2009); Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2006); Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (eds.), *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981); Nick Rees-Roberts, *French Queer Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Robin Griffiths (ed.), *Queer Cinema in Europe*, (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2008); Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin (eds.), *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Thomas Waugh, *The Romance Of Transgression In Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

broader social sciences and humanities literatures.¹³ According to this body of knowledge, sexuality “has been fundamentally, though never simply, affected by several aspects of capitalism: wage labor, commodity production and consumption.”¹⁴ Moreover, this literature suggests that an interlinked analysis of sexual and economic regimes considers “sexually disciplined [and] regulated bodies ... as strategies of capital accumulation.”¹⁵ Even though the relationship between sexuality and economy is mediated, complicated, as well as historically and geographically variable, an economico-sexual examination of social life needs to employ analytic units such as “class and racial hierarchies, gender and sexual institutions, religious and ethnic boundaries ... through which money, political power, cultural resources, and social

¹³ For instance, Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993); Gayle S. Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stanstell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Gary Kinsman, *The Regulation of Desire: Sexuality in Canada*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, And The Attack on Democracy*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Alan Sears, “Queer Anti-Capitalism: What’s Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?”, *Science and Society*, Vol. 69, No. 1, January 2005: 92-112; Peter Drucker, “The Fracturing of LGBT Identities under Neoliberal Capitalism”, *Historical Materialism*, 19.4 (2011): 3-32.

¹⁴ Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 4.

¹⁵ Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 36.

organization flow.”¹⁶ In this way, a social phenomenon can be analyzed as a totality of interlocking constitutive elements. Such an analysis produces a more robust explanatory account of social relations. My thesis relies on this type of intersectional analysis, and contributes to this literature by bringing historical materialism and queer theory into a closer conversation.

In the first chapter, I have two main goals: to develop an anti-capitalist queer reading strategy, and to explore the historical representations of the interplay between sexual and economic regimes in the post-war eras of Keynesianism and neoliberalism in Great Britain as they shape the representation of working-class children’s life possibilities. Using this anti-capitalist queer reading strategy, I analyze two British films, *Kes* (dir. Ken Loach, 1969) and *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000). I begin by explaining the mechanics of anti-capitalist queer reading methods through an investigation of the notions of *queer* and queer times and spaces. Then I examine *Kes* and *Billy Elliot* to explore possibilities for how working-class children resist heteronormative capitalism in different politico-economic eras, and the representation of non-normative spatio-temporal arrangements where they can re-imagine their life possibilities.

¹⁶ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, And The Attack on Democracy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), xiv. Even, the etymology of the word “economy” gives us hint about the inseparable relationship between the economic and the cultural. ‘Economy’ comes from the Greek word *oikonomia*, in which *oikos* means “house” and *nomos* means “managing.” Thus, one can easily argue that heterosexual household management includes both sexuality and economy in it. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=economy>, accessed July 13, 2012.

My rationale for choosing these films is in line with the anti-identitarian premise of queer theory. Queer is not a simple, definable identity category. It cannot be relegated to an umbrella term for all ‘sexual minorities.’ Rather, it offers a sense of openness to various possibilities and experiences in social life. The aim of a queer approach is “to open up the field of possibility ... without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized.”¹⁷ This openness to various possibilities and experiences in social life is urgent not only for ‘sexual minorities,’ but also for those whose lives have been rendered *impossible* by heteronormative capitalism.

To highlight this crucial queer openness, I chose films in which protagonists are not definable as explicitly homosexual. Billy Casper, the protagonist of *Kes*, is not clearly represented as homosexual or heterosexual. Billy Elliot, on the other hand, is explicitly feminized, and his best friend is a gay child. But we cannot jump to an easy conclusion about his sexual identity. I demonstrate that, in these films, heteronormative capitalism is a coercive force compelling working-class boys to become heterosexual miners. Irrespective of their ‘sexual identities’, Billy Casper and Billy Elliot resist the violent mechanisms of normative sexual and economic regimes, and perform non-normative subjectivities by creating queer times and spaces. Examining the ways in which Billy Casper and Billy Elliot generate these non-normative spatio-temporalities, I emphasize that queer times and spaces are much more than sexually ‘positive’ or ‘safe spaces’ for queer people.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), viii.

Chapter two concentrates on *Boys Village*. In particular, I analyze the ways in which Kevin, the protagonist of the film, re-creates an alternative world in the ruins of neoliberalism through his queer aesthetic labour. I examine how Kevin negotiates his queer desire through a constant process of ordering and re-ordering his surroundings, and forming and deforming their meanings. I argue that Kevin's ways of constructing a non-normative world offers an alternative mode of social relations to heteronormative capitalist social relations. To demonstrate this alternative model, I juxtapose Kevin's village with Robinson Crusoe's island that allows me to identify two radically different models of subjectivity in the post-global slump era, and to understand their political implications.

I draw on Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* because Robinson Crusoe has been represented for centuries as the normative subject *par excellence* in the Western cultural imaginary. Defoe tells the story of how a white, bourgeois, heterosexual colonizer carved out a space and created a world for himself in an uninhabited island through a series of interactions with his surroundings. These relationships have been appropriated by bourgeois ideologues to represent the natural, ahistorical truth about 'human essence'. As a result of this representation, subjectivities and lives that diverge from the Robinsonian norm are rendered unintelligible and unlivable by the heteronormative capitalist matrix. Kevin, as an exemplar of non-normative beings, also tries to carve out a space and create a world for himself in an uninhabited and abandoned summer camp. Yet, unlike Robinson Crusoe, Kevin does not exploit anyone's labour-power, and does not engage in sexist and racist modes of domination in this process. I explore Kevin's queer ways of becoming and

Robinson Crusoe's normative ways of being in relation to each other, and examine their socio-political implications in our contemporary world.

Chapter three constitutes an anti-capitalist queer reading of nostalgia as it organizes all three films. First, I provide a brief history of nostalgia, which indicates that in the Western context nostalgia's evolution is directly connected to the development of industrial capitalism. Second, I analyze nostalgia in *Kes*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Boys Village* by drawing on Svetlana Boym's groundbreaking work.¹⁸ As nostalgia is a constituent element of queer times and spaces in these films, I then investigate the relationship between nostalgia and queerness. This investigation focuses specifically on *Boys Village*, where nostalgia pertains not only to the film's content, but also to the very form of the film itself. Here, I examine how nostalgia contributes to the creation of queer times and spaces by evoking non-normative spatio-temporal arrangements. I also investigate the ways in which nostalgia enables a sense of queer futurity in working-class children's struggle against normative sexual and economic regimes.

To conclude, I emphasize the importance of an integrated analysis of the sexual and the economic in the examination of social phenomena, and indicate the contributions of this thesis. Then I address how the findings of this project might be taken up in future research. I end by speculating about the ways in which queer times and spaces are created outside the realm of representation, and might be used to challenge and frustrate heteronormative capitalism.

¹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

CHAPTER TWO:

A QUEER TIME AND SPACE: CLASS, MASCULINITY AND CHILDHOOD IN *KES* AND *BILLY ELLIOT*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I investigate the interplay of economic and sexual regimes that shape the context of working-class masculinity and childhood in *Kes* (Loach, 1969) and *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000) to develop a historical account from the 1960s to contemporary independent British queer cinema. I explore the cultural representations of class, masculinity and childhood in post-war Great Britain, in particular the ways in which these films represent the shift from Keynesian economic liberalism to the neoliberal era under Margaret Thatcher. In performing an anti-capitalist queer reading of these films, I examine how masculinity and class coalesce in molding and creating children's bodies during the so-called golden age of capitalism (1945-1970) and neoliberal capitalism (the 1980s – today).

My first aim is to analyze the heteronormative familial and institutional structures that shape dominant representations of working-class boys. The second is to explore how queer times and spaces, in which the possibilities of resisting capitalist and heteronormative social ontologies blossom, are generated through the slippage between these familial and institutional spaces of childhood. Here, I use Judith (Jack) Halberstam's work on "queer time and space" to interrogate how cultural representations of working class masculinity might be queer(y)ed through an explicit re-imagining of the relations between class, nostalgia and childhood. Lastly, I draw

attention to how these films represent adults' engagement with children's lives as transmittances of dominant societal values.

In the first section of this chapter, I outline the anti-capitalist queer reading strategies I deploy in my analysis of *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*. Emphasizing the importance of anti-capitalist social critique and queer critique, this section is crucial to my subsequent analysis. I begin with a brief definition of the terms queer, queer children, and family as they relate to one another. Then I describe the main tenets of queer reading strategies, and queer time and space. Finally, to provide a more robust analytical account of how working-class boys' subjectivities are represented in *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*, I underline the necessity of incorporating an anti-capitalist social critique into queer reading strategies.

Having introduced my methodological approach to the analysis of these films, the second section concentrates on *Kes*. I start my discussion of *Kes* with a detailed synopsis of the film. Then I delineate the socio-economic context of the 1960s in Great Britain, where the film is set. In the final section, I perform an anti-capitalist queer reading of the film. My reading concentrates on a) how the interplay of sexual and economic regimes disciplines the protagonist's body and life, and b) how the protagonist challenges these existing regimes of power.

The third and last section of this chapter examines the film *Billy Elliot*. To demonstrate the continuities and discontinuities between the socio-economic context of *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*, I begin with the history of the transition from the dominant governance mode of the 1960s (i.e. Keynesian welfare national state) to the new hegemonic form of governance in the 1980s (i.e. neoliberalism) in Great Britain. Once I

narrate the story of *Billy Elliot*, I then perform an anti-capitalist queer reading of the film similar to the one I did for *Kes*.

2.2 ANTI-CAPITALIST QUEER READING STRATEGIES

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick uses the term queer to refer to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically.”¹⁹ This general framework of queer studies allows one to work on sexuality in its complex relations to other spheres of social life. Drawing on Susan Stryker’s work on transgender activism and theory, I conceive of queer as a *modality of being*²⁰ that calls “attention to the operations of normativity within ... identity categories, raise[es] questions about the structuration of power along axes other than the homo/hetero and man/woman binaries, and identif[ies] productive points of attachment for linking sexual orientation and gender identity activism to other social justice struggles,”²¹ rather than a solely sexual category. By emphasizing the relationality of social justice issues, queer as a modality helps to

¹⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 7.

²⁰ Similarly, Michel Foucault argues that “to be ‘gay’ ... is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual but to try to define and develop a way of life” because “a way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalized.” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: The New Press, 1997), 138.

²¹ Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review*, Issue 100 (Winter 2008): 149.

provide a fuller description of the functioning of mechanisms of power in society and a more cautious politics that avoid the dangers associated with reified identity politics.

One vivid example of this queer modality of being can be found in children's lives. I agree with Kathryn Bond Stockton, who contends that "if you scratch a child, you will find a queer,"²² because children often engage with the world in imaginative and sensuous ways that challenge the pervasive and homogenizing effects of heteronormativity and capitalism. In their curious exploration of the world, which adults infantilizingly refer to as *play*, children ask questions that disrupt the *normal* flow of everyday life under hegemonic political technologies of sexual and economic regimes. Yet, children gradually cease asking these questions in the course of their transition to adulthood. Therefore, in my anti-capitalist queer reading of these films, I am interested in detecting not so much a child who has homosexual desire, but the cultural processes through which desire is interpellated through the interplay between sexual and economic regimes. In other words, I am interested in exploring "a failed or troubled meaning-making enterprise"²³ in the process of molding and creating children's bodies.

In the modern Western socio-cultural imaginary, children are assumed to belong to (heterosexual) families. When they exist outside the context of family, children are referred to as street children, waif children, orphans, and so on. Poignant stories about

²² Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

²³ Gabrielle Owen, "Queer Theory Wrestles the "Real" Child: Impossibility, Identity, and Language in Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, Volume 35, Number 3, (Fall 2010): 264.

these “exceptional” children²⁴ contribute to the constitution of the children-family couple as a *synergistic concept*.²⁵ Therefore, when tackling queer children’s experience of social life, it is crucial to shed light on the relationship between children and the (heterosexual) family.

Following Bonnie Fox and Meg Luxton, I understand ‘family’ to be the “product of ideologies (especially those of gender difference, normative heterosexuality, romantic love, motherhood and familism itself), legal practice ... and economic organization”²⁶ that “recruit people to produce children, share their resources, raise their children and care for each other.”²⁷ In other words, the family is an institution in which children are produced, reproduced and socio-sexually formed.²⁸ Although “queer and

²⁴ The classical examples of these genre would be the British author Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838) and the Hungarian author Ferenc Molnár’s *The Paul Street Boys* (1906); more contemporary examples would be the Brazilian author José Mauro De Vasconcelos’ *My Sweet Orange Tree* (1968) and the Afghan-born American author Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003).

²⁵ Synergistic concepts presuppose that two socially constructed concepts cannot operate ‘properly’ unless they coexist.

²⁶ Bonnie Fox and Meg Luxton, “Conceptualizing Family,” in Bonnie J. Fox (ed.), *Family Patterns, Gender Relations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29. For work that unpacks the relationship between families and legal practice and economic organization, see Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, And The Attack on Democracy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003) She writes, “the family was founded on the state-defined and regulated institution of marriage” and “the economy provided the material base for the state institutions and family life.” 6.

²⁷ Fox and Luxton, “Conceptualizing Family,” 29.

²⁸ As Frederick Engels asserts, “the social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor, on the one hand, and of the family on the other.” *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/preface.htm> on November 4, 2012. In addition, Freudian psychoanalytical theory founds itself on the analysis of the Oedipal family, which consists of father-mother-son (daughter).

families are two concepts often diametrically opposed in our popular imagination,”²⁹ queer can be understood as a way of disturbing and frustrating taken-for-granted social idea(l)s, and issuing a challenge to the processes of normalization in the family. If the nuclear heterosexual family under capitalism is the main institution that (re)produces and normalizes social ideas in a series of psychic processes, then queer – not as a sexual orientation, but as a modality of life – becomes incompatible with hegemonic forms of heterosexual family under capitalism.³⁰ Therefore, queer disrupts and transgresses hierarchical binary oppositions (such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual) on which heteronormative capitalism relies. Consequently, queer is understood as ‘an unwelcome thing’ within the heterosexual capitalist matrix, which banishes queers from the heterosexual family as the enemy within.

In my anti-capitalist queer reading of *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*, I analyze the processes that exclude queer from the constitution of the socio-sexual world, including the family. Anti-capitalist queer readings are something “more than just detecting a homosexual subject”³¹ within a given text. They are not “‘alternative’ readings, wishful or willful misreadings, or ‘reading too much into things’ readings. They result from the recognition and articulation of the complex range of queerness that has been in popular

²⁹ Harry M. Benshoff, “Queer and Families in Film: From Problems to Parents,” in Murray Pomerance (ed.), *A Family Affair: Cinema Calls Home*, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), 223.

³⁰ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgendered Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), 1.

³¹ Mareike Jenner, “‘I can’t even imagine what it’s gonna be like here without him:’ Friendship and Queer Theory in American Teen Soap,” *In-Spire Journal of Law, Political and Societies*. Vol. 6. No. 1. 2011: 33.

culture texts and their audiences all along.”³² Queer reading strategies have three main goals. First, a queer reading practice denaturalizes the heteronormative presuppositions that structure a given text, and in doing so, it historically contextualizes the text. Second, by distancing the text from its heterocentric norms, a queer reading adds different layers to the multiple meanings of the text.³³ Third and most important, a queer reading strategy focuses on “in-between spaces of interpretation”³⁴ where the possibilities of opening up a queer time and space lie.

According to Halberstam, queer time and space emerges “from the specifications of lives lived beyond the hetero-reproductive matrix.”³⁵ In other words, “queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction.”³⁶ I extend this definition by emphasizing how queer time and space can also challenge the capitalist-productive matrix because, in our everyday lives, we experience time according to the imperatives of heteronormative capitalism; we are born, we start working (i.e. producing surplus value), we are paid on the basis of socially necessary labour time, we get married, we reproduce, we retire (stop producing surplus value), we die. These are crudely the

³² Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 16.

³³ Hanna Kubowitz, “The Default Reader and a Model of Queer Reading and Writing Strategies Or: Obituary for the Implied Reader,” *Style*: Volume 46, No. 2, Summer 2012.

³⁴ Jenner, 33.

³⁵ Judith Halberstam, “Forgetting Family: Queer Alternatives to Oedipal Relations,” in George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (eds.), *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 319.

³⁶ Halberstam 2005, 1.

moments of our *heteronormative capitalist lives*.³⁷ Every performative action of our bodies is assessed within this rigid matrix of heteronormative capitalism. As long as we meet these normative expectations, we are socially intelligible. If we fail to meet these expectations, then we begin to carve out a space for ourselves in which to struggle against the exclusionary logic of heteronormative capitalist matrix.

My anti-capitalist queer reading examines representations of working-class children's active and conscious efforts to frustrate not only confining heterosexual familial relations, but also alienating capitalist social relations. A working-class family whose labour-power is subjected to capitalist exploitation experiences time and space in accordance with capitalist imperatives, as capitalism asserts its socio-economic relations as a natural fact and an immovable element in human history. In this context, an anti-capitalist reading strategy deconstructs the supposed naturalness of capitalist socio-economic relations, and frames it as a historically and geographically specific mode of production. My reading strategy examines the interplay of heteronormativity and capitalism in working-class children's lives, and shows how these children create a queer time and space in which they renegotiate the rigid boundaries of the existing normative world and create non-normative ways of being.

2.3 KES

Kes is a 1969 film by the acclaimed British director Ken Loach. Adapted from Barry Hines' 1968 novel *A Kestrel for a Knave*, *Kes* tells the story of a fifteen-year-old

³⁷ To be sure, subjective individual histories include much more than these moments. Here, I am solely underlying what heteronormative capitalism systematically requires from individual lives.

working-class boy, Billy Casper, who lives in the mining town of Barnsley, South Yorkshire. “My novels are mostly about working-class life,” Hines writes, in which “the men work in mines and steelworks, the women in underpaid menial jobs – or, increasingly, are on the dole. I feel a strong sense of social injustice on behalf of these people which stems from my own mining background.”³⁸ Loach retains the spirit of Hines’ writing. By working with non-professional actors, and preserving “the accents and colloquialisms of northern England in the film’s dialogue,”³⁹ Loach adopts a naturalistic style that encourages the audience affectively to engage with Billy’s suffocating life under the castrating social relations of liberal capitalism and heteronormativity.

Billy lives with his mother and older brother in a working-class neighbourhood; his father abandoned them years before. His inattentive mother works at an underpaid menial job and tries to convince her boyfriend to marry her to provide a better life for herself and her children. Billy’s older brother, who shares the same room and bed with Billy, is a miner who directs his discontent and anger with his “dreary and dangerous job”⁴⁰ at his mother and Billy.

Billy works as a neighbourhood paperboy, anticipating the time he will be forced to become a miner like the rest of the men in the town. For the moment, he hopes for a different future that does not force him to “go down in the pit.” As Billy is precocious, poor, small, bad at football, and disheveled in appearance, he is often

³⁸ Barry Hines and Allan Stronach, *The Play of Kes*, (Oxford: Heinemann, 1993) v-vi.

³⁹ Mike Robins, “Kes,” retrieved from <http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cteq/kes/#b7> on October 28, 2012.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

mistreated by his principal, teachers, and classmates. During a stroll one day, he is struck by the beauty of kestrels. He runs to a library to research these wild birds. When he learns that kestrels can be trained, Billy's uneventful life gains meaning and a new purpose. He discovers the location of the nest of kestrels, removes a baby from the nest, names it Kes, and begins a series of attempts to train it.

The complex meanings of *Kes* are contextualized by its social situatedness in the so-called golden age of capitalism. In this era, the Keynesian welfare national state (KWNS) was the dominant governance paradigm in continental Europe, the Commonwealth, and North America. British sociologist Bob Jessop delineates KWNS's four dimensions. First, in *Keynesian* governance, the state secures "the conditions for profitable private business mainly through demand-side management."⁴¹ Second, "in reproducing labour-power as a fictitious commodity, KWNS social policy had a distinctive *welfare* orientation"⁴² insofar as it provided free health care, education, and a family wage. Third, as workers are not only bearers of labour-power but also have multiple identities, the KWNS had to relate "social and economic rights to citizenship of a *national* territorial state"⁴³ to solve the possible "problems regarding social inclusion and coherence."⁴⁴ Fourth, "the KWNS was *statist* insofar as state institutions

⁴¹ Bob Jessop, "The Changing Governance of Welfare: Recent Trends in its Primary Functions, Scale, and Modes of Coordination." (1999), 2.

Retrieved from Jessop's website: http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/237/2/F-2000d_SPA4.pdf on October 29, 2012.

⁴² Ibid. 3.

⁴³ Ibid. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 2.

(on different levels) were the chief supplement to market forces in securing the conditions for economic growth and social cohesion.”⁴⁵

“As an apparatus of social control,”⁴⁶ KWNS involved greater state intervention to regulate its citizens’ bodies and lives. It constructed the consumerist, white middle-class family as the ideal model of the day through the use external forms of governance, such as the police, social workers, and educational institutions. The KWNS excluded marginalized women, people of colour, immigrants, and refugees, and provided very limited life opportunities to many in the working class as they fell outside of the ideal family model.⁴⁷ As a result of this exclusion, common KWNS ‘helping practices’ became “modes of domination that created enforced dependency,”⁴⁸ particularly for marginalized groups.

Kes portrays the ways in which these modes of exclusion and dependency play out in shaping working-class children’s lives. Alan Sinfield argues that in the grammar of the film, “the only thing for a boy to do is become a man, and that means not being weak, and not being different.”⁴⁹ Sinfield then claims that, in *Kes*, “Billy’s sexuality is not flagged as an issue. ... There is no reason to ponder his sexuality. ... Billy Casper is not accused of being feminine, or queer... In fact, the writers seem to protect him from

⁴⁵ Ibid. 3.

⁴⁶ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State”, *Signs*, 19.2, (Winter 1994): 330.

⁴⁷ Alan Sears, “The ‘Lean’ state and The Capitalist Reconstruction: Towards a Theoretical Account”, *Studies in Political Economy* 59, (Summer 1999): 93.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Alan Sinfield, “Boys, Class and Gender: From Billy Casper to Billy Elliot,” *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 62, (Autumn 2006): 168.

that imputation. Their text resists any inclination to isolate Billy Casper from customary maleness.”⁵⁰ In spite of these attempts to secure Billy’s (hetero)sexuality, I suggest that a queer reading strategy focusing on the mechanisms of gender formation in *Kes* foregrounds the representation of sexuality in working-class children’s lives. I argue that the relationship between the socio-economic paradigm (KWNS) and heteronormativity as it is organized through gendered social relations is formative in the process of shaping and creating Billy’s body. What economic and sexual possibilities did the so-called golden age of capitalism offer to Billy? What kinds of bodies are desired, intelligible and useful in the heteronormative capitalist matrix of social relations? How does *Kes* portray the processes that socially regulate Billy’s body?

Billy’s family consists of his mother, older brother and himself. The absence of a father, who inscribes the socio-sexual-economic order onto children’s body through Oedipal relations, renders Billy’s family an exception to the state’s idealized version of family. Yet, this exception is not transgressive. It does not indicate that women can exercise power and maintain a family without being dependent on a man. Billy’s mother tries to convince her boyfriend to marry her and thereby reconstitute the heterofamilial unit because, according to her, being deprived of a father makes Billy “a hopeless case.” Within the logic of the film, the absence of Billy’s father reproduces the heteronormative rule by highlighting its lack in this family situation and by causing financial chaos in the operation of the family.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Billy's older brother Jud, who is a local womanizer, works in a mine. He is aware of the fundamental lack of a father in their family. His response to this lack is to perform hegemonic masculinity in relation to his mother and brother. He opposes his mother's affair, which threatens his position in the family as a substitute father. As part of heteronormative capitalism that "demands a steady supply of unskilled manual labour"⁵¹ and its continual reproduction, Jud attempts to *tame* Billy "through punches and insults"⁵² so that Billy will internalize the existing gendered, classed and sexualized values of society.

In this context, Billy's body becomes a resource of unskilled manual labour, and his psyche becomes a heterosexualized plane upon which the sustainability of the economic system rests. Billy's body is a contested site for Jud's performance of heteropatriarchal masculinity, and yet Billy still tries to pursue a life that resists the limits of working class masculinity. Billy's corporeal and psychic totality is also contested outside his family. School, in particular, functions as a mechanism of reproducing socio-sexual-economic hierarchies. Five important aspects of students' bodies are the main determinant of their identity at school: "*height* (specifically, the importance of physical development, where size marks social independence and 'titch' is a form of abuse), *shape*, *appearance*, *gender* (all based on adult, heterosexual notions of desirability and issues of morality) and *performance* (including dynamic aspects such as

⁵¹ Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach: Art in the Service of the People*, (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002) 64.

⁵² Robins, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cteq/kes/#b7>.

gracefulness and sporting prowess or ability).”⁵³ As a short, small, and pale boy, Billy does not fulfill the physical requirements of a soon-to-be miner. He neither wants to be involved in a school gang, nor is he interested in having a girlfriend. He does not seem to care about being perceived as feminine, or at least less masculine than his peers.

Billy is bullied at school when he defends his mother from insults about her affairs with men in town. But his reaction is not typically masculine because he defends his mother only when he feels his classmates’ treatment is unjust, rather than to secure his mother’s chastity. At the end of an argument about his mother in which he is physically attacked, Billy finds himself on a mound of coal, repulsed by this symbol of mining. His friends’ violence, along with Jud’s violence, hammers home the message: You’re a man. A man is a miner. A miner has to have a family in which to produce other miners.

Billy is a loner who makes no effort to blend into his social environment. For instance, during a soccer game, Billy not only comes improperly dressed as a teammate, but also purposefully gives away a goal. He demonstrates a *double reluctance* in relation to performing expected social norms. First, he does not conform to a normative gender identity because a boy is expected to be aggressive and adventurous. Second, he is unwilling to conform to sports etiquette, a working-class boy faces the cultural expectation to be interested in soccer. This scene is exemplary of Billy’s unwillingness to conform to societal norms related to both gender and class. In doing so, Billy not

⁵³ Gill Valentine, “Children’s Bodies: An Absent Presence,” in Kathrin Hörschelmann and Rachel Colls (eds.), *Contested Bodies of Childhood and Youth*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.

only transgresses social norms of masculine interest in sport, but also actively creates a queer time and space in which he renegotiates his relationship to the world he inhabits.

Billy suspends normative expectations of what his life will become when he starts playing with his kestrel. As opposed to his otherwise bleak portrayal in the film, Billy is represented as genuinely happy and engaged when training the kestrel. He is hopeful about creating a meaningful exchange with the bird, mobilizing his affective labour to build such a close relationship. In turn, this new relationship changes Billy by affirming his creative capacities. He realizes the possibility of experiencing an unalienated relationship in this space and time. By opening up a space that breaks linear history and causality, Billy shifts the meaning of his future identity; no longer does he have to be a masculine miner whose labour-power is exploited in the pit and whose possibilities of sexual pleasure are channeled through heteronormative and reproductive expectations. Billy asserts a different subjectivity that is not defined by his identity as a working-class boy, but rather by *where* he is and in *what kinds* of activities he is engaging. He thus makes a dramatic “shift in emphasis from identity to practices” that “opens up options for desire, intimacy, friendship and exploration beyond those which are possible within”⁵⁴ heteronormative capitalism.

In the representational universe of *Kes*, Billy’s training of the kestrel is not divorced from material reality. Rather, it is a conscious political effort that allows him to renegotiate the rigid boundaries of the heteronormative affective economy and

⁵⁴ Margot Francis, “On the Myths of Sexual Orientation: Field Notes from the Personal, Pedagogical, and Historical Discourses of Identity,” in eds. Maureen FitzGerald and Scott Rayter, *Queerly Canadian: An Introductory Reading in Sexuality Studies*, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc, 2012), 16.

reimagine the alienating social relations of capitalism. The distinction between training and taming is crucial in terms of Billy's relation to Kes. While heteronormative capitalist society attempts to tame him in *normal* time and space, Billy trains Kes with affection and without violence. Because "the kestrel was the one animal in medieval society that the lower echelons could freely own,"⁵⁵ Billy's relationship to Kes creates a narrative of solidarity that recalls that history while articulating a common longing for a more egalitarian world. Nostalgic representations of kestrel training in the film allow Billy "a refiguring of time and feeling in response to personal losses that in so doing become collective and also potentially productive of new feelings and knowledge that might lead to action."⁵⁶ In this queer time and space of training, and through these new possibilities, Billy creates a queer kinship that illustrates his 'personal troubles' as directly related to exploitive regimes – as opposed to the neoliberal telos of individual responsibility. By unsettling the assumptions of dominant heteronormative capitalist ideologies and indicating that another world is possible, queer time and space fulfills a political function in *Kes*.

Two additional scenes portray queer times and spaces. First, in the abovementioned scene where classmates beat Billy because he defends his mother and himself, Billy creates a queer time and space by allying himself with his mother against the school bullies and contesting the dominant perception of women's sexual pleasure. Heteronormative capitalism organizes space and time for women's sexual pleasure in

⁵⁵ Graham Fuller, *Loach on Loach*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) 43.

⁵⁶ Alexandra Juhasz, "Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology and Queer Archive Activism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12.2, (2006): 321-322.

accordance with “strict bourgeois respectability”⁵⁷ that forbids women to ‘waste’ their sexual capacities “on unproductive and libidinous pleasures.”⁵⁸ By defending his mother’s right to a certain sexual freedom over-and-against existing norms, Billy resists gendered respectability as shaped by heteronormative capitalism. Second, in the scene in which Billy describes his relationship with Kes to his classmates in the classroom there is a depiction of another example of creating a queer time and space. The audience, his classmates, and his teacher see Billy deeply engaged with something for the first time. His contagious enthusiasm mesmerizes everyone. By telling the story of his new relationship, Billy not only takes over the position of power in the classroom, which is usually used to naturalize hierarchical student-teacher relations (in preparation for hierarchical owner-worker relations), but also pushes his audience to think about their own lives under the grid of existing socio-economic-affective relations.

2.4 BILLY ELLIOT

After twenty years of being the dominant form of governance in the Western world, KWNS withered away with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. It was replaced in the 1980s by Margaret Thatcher’s and Ronald Reagan’s economic policies of neoliberalism,⁵⁹ a new governance paradigm that included deregulation of the

⁵⁷ Halberstam 2005, 5.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 45.

⁵⁹ Even though neoliberalism is synonymous with Margaret Thatcher, who was in power from 1979 to 1990 as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Ronald Reagan, who served as the 40th President of the United States from 1981 to 1989, its “dress rehearsals” were done before the 1980s. In 1973, the Chilean military staged a coup against the Socialist President Salvador Allende. The military junta led by

market, privatization of social reproduction, and the contracting out of public services. Neoliberalism has since become the dominant form of governance in the Western world, known for its “systematic use of state power to impose market imperatives”⁶⁰ and its aim “to boost capital’s profits and shift the balance of power in society in capital’s favour.”⁶¹ Neoliberalism has attempted to destroy all “collective structures which may impede the pure market logic.”⁶² Trade unions in the United Kingdom are an example of these collective structures. When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, trade union density was 48.8%⁶³ in the United Kingdom. Having witnessed the political power of the working-classes, Thatcher famously stated that trade unions were “the enemy within,”⁶⁴ and initiated a violent attack on unions and the working-classes using

Augusto Pinochet - whose fascist dictatorship slaughtered thousands - started to restructure the Chilean economy in accordance with the economic rules developed by Milton Friedman and his mentor Friedrich von Hayek, which then became the creed of neoliberal governments of the world. See David McNally, *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2010), 35.

⁶⁰ Alfred Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, “Introduction” in *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005), 3.

⁶¹ David Camfield, “Public Sector ‘Reform’ and the Future of Public Sector Unions” *CCPA Review*, Manitoba, (2005): 2.

⁶² Pierre Bourdieu, “Utopia of Endless Exploitation: The Essence of Neoliberalism,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 1998. Retrieved from <http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu/> on October 29, 2012.

⁶³ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Trade Union Density Statistics, retrieved from http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN_DEN# on October 29, 2012.

⁶⁴ Paul Wilenius, “Enemy within: Thatcher and the unions” Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3067563.stm> on October 29, 2012.

the police, socio-economic policies, and discursive strategies. As a result of these attacks, when Thatcher left the office in 1990, trade union density was down to 38.2%.⁶⁵

Billy Elliot (2000), directed by Stephen Daldry, is set during the most violent years of this war on trade unions - the 1984-5 UK miners' strike - in fictional County Durham mining town of Everington, which is virtually under siege by Thatcher's police forces. Eleven-year-old Billy Elliot, whose mother has recently passed away, has a father and brother on the picket lines, as well as a grandmother on the verge of dementia. In the midst of these familial and socio-economic difficulties, Billy is accidentally introduced to ballet, and becomes passionately attached to it during his boxing training. But his father forbids him from going to ballet classes as the only male student. In despair and anger, Billy seeks out his ballet teacher's home, where she encourages him to audition for the Royal Ballet School. She also decides secretly to give Billy private lessons to ensure he is successful in the audition. Only Billy's best friend Michael, who is depicted as the sole gay child in the film, knows about these lessons.

Due to its enormous international success, *Billy Elliot* has garnered considerable scholarly attention across academic fields.⁶⁶ It has commonly been understood as a story

⁶⁵ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Trade Union Density Statistics, retrieved from http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=UN_DEN# on October 29, 2012.

⁶⁶ See, for example, David Alderson, "Making Electricity: Narrating Gender, Sexuality, and the Neoliberal Transition in *Billy Elliot*," *Camera Obscura*, Volume 25, Number 3 (2011): 1-27; Helen Freshwater, "Consuming Authenticities: *Billy Elliot the Musical* and the Performing Child," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 36 (2012): 154-173; George Rodosthenous, "Billy Elliot The Musical: visual representations of working-class masculinity and the all-singing, all-dancing bo[d]y," *Studies in Musical Theatre*, 1 (3). (2007): 275-292; Jon Judy, "Better to Be a Dancer Than a Miner: Commonalities in 'Billy Elliot'," *Screen*

of transition, transformation and transcendence: an economic transformation from KWNS to neoliberalism; a gendered transition from traditional working-class masculinity to “a more tolerant, expressive, cosmopolitan”⁶⁷ masculinity; a subjective transcendence from “the working-class duckling ... into the middle class and properly masculine swan;”⁶⁸ and an agential transformation from collective action to individual action. My reading of the film, however, examines the ways in which the narrative functions to regulate Billy’s body, as well as the consequences of these regulations. I also focus on how Billy, as he generates queer moments and spaces, disrupts these processes of regulation. Rather than focusing on Billy’s sexual orientation, I explore how a heteronormative capitalist matrix of social relations requires and produces boys as non-libidinal, heterosexual, masculine and ready-to-be-exploited bodies. I investigate why and how heteronormative capitalism erases the libidinal, pleasure-oriented and sensuous characteristics of children’s bodies that enable them to maintain omnisexual and non-alienated relations with the world. I also explore how the film represents working-class queer children’s everyday resistance against heteronormative capitalist regimes of power.

Education, No. 59, (2010): 117-123; Camino, Mercedes “‘Good luck with the strike’: Mining, Dancing and Stephen Daldry’s *Billy Elliot*,” *Film International*, 8 (5). (2010): 29-39; Cora Kaplan, “The death of the working class hero,” *New Formations*, No. 52, (2004): 94-110; Judith Lancioni, “Cinderella Dances Swan Lake: Reading *Billy Elliot* as Fairytale,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 39, No. 5, (2006): 709-728; Cynthia Weber, “Oi. Dancing Boy!/: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Youth in *Billy Elliot*,” *Genders* 37, 2003. Retrieved from http://www.genders.org/g37/g37_weber.html on October 27, 2012.

⁶⁷ Alderson, 2.

⁶⁸ Weber, paragraph 42.

Fifteen years after the end of the so-called golden age of capitalism that created the conditions of heteronormative mining culture for Billy Casper (*Kes*), Billy Elliot's body becomes a contested site for representing masculine boys' bodies during the onset of neoliberal capitalism led by Thatcher. As in Billy Casper's case, capitalism and heteronormativity are the main, yet obscured social forces that shape this process. However, in this context, the interplay between these two forces is different. *Billy Elliot* portrays a reconfiguration of traditional working-class masculinity as represented by Jud in *Kes*. In *Billy Elliot*, Billy's father, Jackie, signifies the decay of this mode of masculinity, while Billy's older brother Tony reclaims and re-makes this outdated masculinity when battling against Thatcher's police forces. Symbolically, this clash might be considered a collective masculine battle against the neoliberal forces of castration.

In this socio-political context, Billy Elliot does not conform to traditional forms of masculinity. On the contrary, at home he engages in traditionally feminine pursuits, such as taking care of his aged grandmother and preparing breakfast for her. While these performances could be attributed to the death of his mother, Billy also secretly listens and dances to Tony's long-playing records. And even before being introduced to ballet, Billy incorporates dance into his boxing class. While Billy Casper's physical education classes in *Kes* aim to produce the body of a soon-to-be working-class man, in *Billy Elliot* boxing is geared to producing bodies that will have to fight against the brutality of a capitalist state as the town is under police siege. Ballet classes are usually designed to produce girls' bodies – bodies that will *accompany* boys throughout their lives. Hetero-gendered socialization practices of dance and boxing shape children's

lives and their position in the private and public spheres, and any transgression of this shaping may be sanctioned.

One day during his boxing class, Billy is introduced to ballet – ironically, due to the lack of space for the ballet class caused by the ongoing strike. His first encounter with ballet prefigures an intense relationship with dance that allows Billy to inscribe incommunicable meanings within the symbolic order through bodily practice. Although he understands that attending ballet classes signifies femininity, he nevertheless joins the ballet class. When Jackie discovers his son’s new avocation, he furiously demands that Billy stop attending ballet classes. When Tony discovers Billy’s new passion, he “humiliates Billy by placing him on the table and ordering him to dance. ‘What are you trying to do, make him a scab all his life?’ Tony demands of Mrs. Wilkinson [Billy’s ballet teacher]. So, ballet dancing - becoming a ‘poof’ - represents political and class defection ...”⁶⁹ As traditional working-class masculinity assumes a linear correlation between physical sex, gender-sexual identity, and class position, the failure to conform to traditional working-class masculinity translates into a failure of class identity. Therefore, any break in this normative linear logic in the film’s narrative is represented as having potentially serious consequences in terms of Billy’s subject formation. Like Billy Casper, Billy Elliot receives the normative message: “You’re a man. A man is a miner who has to be strong and ready for any confrontation. A miner is necessarily heterosexual.”

⁶⁹ Alderson, 15.

Despite being reprimanded by his father and brother, Billy follows his passion for dance, which he describes in his audition for the Royal Ballet School as akin to “flying like a bird. Like electricity, electricity, sparks inside of me, and I’m free, I’m free.” Billy defends his choice of dance by asserting to his father that ‘non-poofs’ dance ballet as well, and yet he talks about his private lessons with only his gay friend Michael. Michael applies Billy lipstick, kisses him on his cheek while cross-dressing, and takes Billy’s cold hands into his jacket to warm. Billy cares solely about Michael’s opinion of his vocational choice (ballet dancing rather than mining), and when Michael says he would miss Billy if he were to leave town to become a dancer, Billy gets genuinely upset. On the other hand, when Billy’s ballet teacher’s daughter Debbie offers to show him her ‘fanny,’ Billy refuses to look. Similarly, when Debbie caresses Billy’s hair and waits for him to kiss her, Billy does not respond. Through these small gestures, Billy challenges the normative hetero-gendered expectations of his society.

But beyond his challenge to normative gender expectations, Billy Elliot’s commitment to the avocation of dance also *creates* a queer time and space. In this context, Billy’s body is no longer destined to be consumed by the requirements of neoliberal capital accumulation that has decimated union protections, and legal regulations of health, safety and social benefits. Instead, he is able to enhance the meaning of his body through an active meaning-making process. No longer simply a ‘poof’ who dances, Billy constructs a new subjectivity by asserting a dancing body in opposition to a mining body. In creating a queer space, Billy calls attention to different temporalities. A miner, because of his job and the precarious work necessitated by deregulated markets, lives close to death every day. Therefore, his sense of temporality

is based on temporariness and contingency. On the other hand, a capitalist will likely experience time in terms of longevity and permanence because capital accumulation protects the owner from many contingencies. In contrast to both kinds of time, Billy's engagement with dance suspends time marked by capitalist oppression and accumulation, and asserts instead the joy of a more ephemeral marking of time through artistic creation.

Through dance Billy enacts his mother's aesthetic sensibilities (who throughout the film provides him an emotional shelter and spring of courage through her absent presence), and fulfills his grandmother's dream of becoming a professional dancer. These cross-gender creative attachments assert a queer time and space by generating different modes of remembering, caring, mourning, belonging and relating. Indeed, Billy's nostalgic use of these new modalities allows him to articulate the loss of his mother and his grandmother's long-lost dreams by incorporating them into his own future. In so doing, Billy rekindles a sense of intergenerational solidarity that challenges confining regimes of heteronormative and capitalist power.

As I mention above, the queer time and space that is created through Billy's attachment to dance is by no means divorced from material reality. It has a complicated relation with history and politics. Billy's choice of ballet implicitly criticizes existing social, sexual and economic relations, which exclude him. However, Billy's corporeal engagement with dance inscribes new meanings that challenge the existing planes of the social world. Indeed, I suggest that previous readings of this film, which claim that *Billy Elliot* is nihilistic or escapist, miss the political meanings of queer time and space. Billy questions traditional working-class masculinity in a time when there is a great need for

social transformation. In the scene where Tony heroically runs away from the police and is brutally arrested, Billy's despair reveals that traditional working-class masculinity serves the capitalist state because masculinist revolt against the paternal state simply reinforces castrating police brutality. Billy attempts to break free from this Oedipal relation by redefining the meaning of his body, and actively inscribing that new meaning onto the world through dance.

In the last scene of the film, we see Jackie, Tony, Michael (who is now a 'fabulous' transgendered person) and Michael's black boyfriend attending Billy's performance as the lead dancer in the acclaimed gay version of *Swan Lake* (1997), choreographed by Matthew Bourne.⁷⁰ Composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Swan Lake* tells the story of a princess who is turned into a swan by an evil curse; it is only through a prince's love that she can become a human being again. By casting only male dancers, Bourne radically changes this aristocratic male-female love story into something else. Daldry's choice to conclude the film with Billy's performance in this version of *Swan Lake* certainly asserts a more explicit queer reference than is found anywhere else in the film. Billy, as the lead dancer in the ballet, is the prince's object of desire. This concluding scene generates queer time and space as Billy refuses the norms and social positionings enforced by his environment.

For most of the film, Billy's assumed heterosexuality is protected. It is Michael who is represented as being excluded from the working-class because he "really is" a

⁷⁰ Retrieved from http://www.new-adventures.net/matthew_bourne/biography on November 11, 2012.

Bourne's *Swan Lake* won numerous prestigious international awards including two Tonys, Drama Desk, Outer Critics' Circle, Astaire Award, Olivier Award, South Bank Show Award, Time Out Award, LA Critics' Circle, MEN Award, Dramalogue Award.

“poof.” Until the concluding scene, the film also protects Billy’s heterosexuality by placing his dancing body inside a masculine space (Billy’s private lessons are set in the boxing room, not in the ballet room), performing masculine dance figures (his figures blend with boxing moves), and invoking famous male ballet dancers who had masculine bodies.⁷¹ Yet, in the final scene, the film creates queer time and space where the assumption of heterosexuality is thrown into question. Moreover, in the narrative of *Swan Lake*, Billy *becomes human* as another man’s object of desire. In other words, the queer time and space that Billy creates through his passion for dance allows him to explore non-normative intimacies and unapologetically to experience them in front of the audience.

My examination of *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*, investigated how filmic representations of working-class children’s bodies were subjected to heteronormative and capitalist matrices from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s in Great Britain. It also explores the ways in which these children resisted normative sexual and economic regimes and performed non-normative subjectivities by constructing queer times and spaces.

⁷¹ Weber, http://www.genders.org/g37/g37_weber.html.

CHAPTER THREE:

BOYS VILLAGE: A QUEER END TO THE CAPITALIST MYTH OF ORIGINS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I investigate the representations of heteronormative capitalism's violence against queer working-class children in historical and contemporary contexts through a detailed analysis of the independent short film, *Boys Village* (dir. Till Kleinert, 2011). As I demonstrate in the previous chapter, heteronormative capitalism limits the life possibilities of working-class children, who in turn resist these limitations by creating queer times and spaces within otherwise normative social lives. Billy Casper (*Kes*) and Billy Elliot live with their families, go to school, and socialize with their friends. In these ways, they live 'social lives.' In contrast, the queer working-class protagonist of *Boys Village*, Kevin, lives alone, isolated in an abandoned village for boys. Isolation signifies a qualitative difference in terms of the violent operations of heteronormative capitalism on the lives of queer working-class children. Abstracted from social interactions and relations, Kevin's life denotes the climax of violence enacted by heteronormative capitalism.

Boys Village has been circulated exclusively in lesbian and gay film festival networks.⁷² As most readers will not have had an opportunity to see the film, I begin

⁷² The film has been screened at the following festivals: *Iris Prize Festival*, Cardiff; *Hamburg Queer Film Festival*; *Reeling*, the Chicago Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival; *Beijing Film Academy International Film Festival*; *Melbourne Queer Film Festival*; *Fantaspoo*, International Fantastic Film Festival of Porto Alegre; *InsideOut*, Toronto LGBT Film Festival; *Outfest*, Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian

this chapter with a brief synopsis of *Boys Village*. Then, because Robinson Crusoe is the archetype of an isolated existence in the Western cultural imaginary, I develop an analysis of *Boys Village* that juxtaposes Robinson Crusoe's island with Kevin's village. I investigate mainstream economists' appropriation of Robinson Crusoe as the normative bourgeois subject and origin myth for (heteronormative) capitalism. His juxtaposition with Kevin reveals the continuities of the violence of heteronormative capitalism, and sheds light on the implications of this appropriation for those who do not embody a normatively gendered, racialized and sexualized subjectivity. I illustrate the ways in which these implications play out in the current political landscape of the social world. To elucidate the stories of these normatively excluded others, I examine *Boys Village* in connection to *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*. Thirdly, I examine Kevin's relation to the teenage visitors of the village, who escape from the confines of reified and alienated lives. Here I analyse the multiple meanings of the teenagers' visits to the village, and specifically focus on Kevin's relationship to one of these teenagers who dies at the end of the film. Finally, I explore the ways in which Kevin produces queer times and spaces using queer aesthetic sensibilities to prevail over these violent conditions.

3.2 BOYS VILLAGE

Released in 2011 by German director Till Kleinert, *Boys Village* is set in St. Athan Boy's Village, an actual historical site that was founded as a village-style holiday

Film Festival; *SoSoGay* London Screenings; *North Carolina Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*, Durham NC; *Out in Desert*, Tuscon LGBT Film Festival.

camp in West Aberthaw, Vale of Glamorgan, Wales. The film opens by detailing the camp's spatial and historical context: "Opened in 1925 as a summer camp for the sons from families in the South Wales Coalfield, it offered them a place to play and to be free. It has long been abandoned now." Kleinert depicts the abandoned space of the camp, including scattered remains of the buildings, shattered windows, graffiti, a pitch-dark basement room, and shredded dolls. He then introduces viewers to Kevin,⁷³ an eleven-year-old boy who has been living in *Boys Village* for quite some time.⁷⁴

Kevin wears an earth-coloured shirt and shorts with a green woollen sweater and socks throughout the film, the seeming remnants of a respectable childhood. In the first scene, he walks through an empty swimming pool placing little stones along its side, an action that seems to signal his desire to bring a personal sense of order and domesticity to places in the ramshackle village. We see him playing with stones while talking to his handmade dolls, and reading a piece of paper as he pretends to study. Having depicted Kevin's peaceful occupation and fastidious organization of this derelict space, the mood then shifts as a group of teenagers aggressively burst into the village, and begin trashing the space and writing graffiti on the walls. As Kevin hides in the bushes, a teenager writes "you're next" with black spray paint on a red background. Kevin may be hiding, but he is also paradoxically seeking the attention of the teenagers. He throws a small

⁷³ Kevin's name is not pronounced in the film, I discovered it at the Iris Prize's web page (<http://www.irisprize.org/boys-village/>), and the 22nd annual Inside Out Toronto LGBT film festival's program guide (p. 29).

⁷⁴ *Inside Out* Toronto LGBT Film Festival, "Program Guide", (Toronto: 2012), 29. <http://www.insideout.ca/uploads/documents/2012%20Inside%20Out%20Program%20Guide.pdf>, accessed July 13, 2012.

stone through a window at the leader of the group. We intuit that some kind of relationship exists between Kevin and this teenager, especially given that Kevin gazes at him longingly. Shortly thereafter, the teenagers leave the village. Once they are gone, Kevin tidies up their mess. He proceeds to the village chapel, falls on his knees and begins to pray. We follow Kevin as he walks, carrying three flowers, to the pitch-dark entrance we first saw in the opening scene. On the threshold of the entrance, he replaces wilted flowers with the fresh ones.

Sometime later, the teenagers return to the village, this time to drink wine, smoke cigarettes and sniff glue. The leader's t-shirt gets ripped when he has a brief altercation with one of his friends. When the teenagers leave, Kevin fetches a piece of t-shirt fabric that belongs to the leader's t-shirt, and makes a doll with it. Kevin says to the doll, "You're such a pretty boy."

That evening, the leader arrives at the village with his girlfriend. He lights a fire in a large barrel for warmth, which also illuminates the darkness. We see Kevin's face; he is upset. When the teenager heads inside for a moment, leaving his girlfriend alone outside, Kevin takes the opportunity to frighten her by throwing stones at the barrel. The teenager emerges with one of Kevin's dolls, and gives it to his girlfriend, claiming he made it for her. At this moment, the teenager seems to be engaging in a concrete, material way with the things Kevin has made and strategically placed around the village. When the two teenagers are about to kiss, Kevin makes disturbing verbal sounds, which frighten off the girl. The disappointed youth masturbates as Kevin watches from nearby bushes. Kevin, in his excitement, moves to get a closer look, but the noise he makes alerts the teenager to his presence. The young man rushes to the

bushes to catch the voyeur, but instead finds the doll Kevin made with the fragment of his t-shirt.

To evade detection, Kevin runs to the dark room. On the threshold, he hesitates, but realises he has no choice but to step into the darkness. The teenage boy follows Kevin into the room, using his cellphone to illuminate the interior space. Even though the light from the phone falls directly onto Kevin's face, the teenager does not see him and turns back. At this point we are not sure if Kevin actually exists, even though he seems to have inhabited the abandoned village for some time. Kevin shouts "wait", but the teenager walks away, toward another wall, assuming that the voice is coming from the other side. He squats down and listens to the wall. Kevin follows, and slowly bends towards the teenager and kisses his lips. Startled by the kiss, the teenager falls into the decrepit wall and is seriously injured. Not sure if he is dead, Kevin shakes the teenager, who opens his eyes to see the boy holding a doll. The teenager asks Kevin if he made the doll, and then requests that he call an ambulance. We then hear the beep of a car-horn outside. Kevin jumps up, tells the teenager he is sorry, and hurriedly gets into an old car from the 1930s.

The film ends with an excavator razing the abandoned village on a sunny day. As the buildings fall, a construction worker finds the teenage boy's corpse, which lies beside a decomposed human skull, grasping Kevin's doll. He cries, "there is a body in the basement!"

3.3 FROM ROBINSON CRUSOE'S ISLAND TO KEVIN'S VILLAGE

3.3.1 ROBINSON CRUSOE'S ISLAND

According to the origin myth of mainstream economics, in the beginning was Robinson Crusoe. When publishing his masterpiece *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*⁷⁵ on 25 April 1719, Daniel Defoe⁷⁶ (ca. 1660-1731) did not know that neoclassical economists would appropriate his fictional character and utilize him as the embodiment of *homo economicus*,⁷⁷ an isolated individual “occupied solely in acquiring and consuming wealth”⁷⁸ to satisfy his/her subjective needs and desires. As Adam Smith famously put it, “it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the

⁷⁵ This book tells the story of a shipwrecked Englishman, who is thrown onto an uninhabited island after many dangerous adventures, and of his relationship with a “savage” named Friday.

⁷⁶ Defoe was “one of the first writers to rely on the growing market of the middle class to earn his living,” and he published many essays and pamphlets on the social and economic issues of his day. Stephen Hymer, “Robinson Crusoe and The secret of Primitive Accumulation,” *Monthly Review*. Volume 63. Issue 04. September 2011. Retrieved from <http://monthlyreview.org/2011/09/01/robinson-crusoe-and-the-secret-of-primitive-accumulation> on February 07, 2013.

⁷⁷ Although some scholars argue that Defoe's Crusoe is different from the character depicted by neoclassical economists, I am interested in the dominant interpretation of Robinson Crusoe in social and political thought. Therefore, my analysis focuses on the social construction of Robinson Crusoe as the quintessential economic human. For the differences between Defoe's Crusoe and that of the neoclassical economists see: Matthew Watson, “Competing Models of Socially Constructed Economic Man: Differentiating Defoe's Crusoe from the Robinson of Neoclassical Economics”, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 16, No.5, November 2011, pp. 609-626; Maximillian E. Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962.

⁷⁸ John Stuart Mill, “On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation Proper To It” in *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, 1844. Retrieved from <http://www.econlib.org/library/Mill/mIUQP5.html#Essay%20V.%20On%20the%20Definition%20of%20Political%20Economy> on February 07, 2013.

baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”⁷⁹ These utility-maximizing Robinsonades have represented “human nature” for economists and therefore have been taken as the starting-point of mainstream capitalist economics, and the embodiment of normative bourgeois subjectivity.

According to Roland Barthes, stories, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, that achieve mythic status are the security operations of hegemonic power relations, which represent certain social relations as timeless, natural, inevitable and unchallengeable, rather than historically and geographically specific.⁸⁰ Deconstructing this neoclassical myth of origin reveals that dominant relations of class, gender, race and sexuality organize it. Questions related to these social relations are therefore crucial in deconstructing the (heteronormative) capitalist myth: 1) How does the use of Robinson Crusoe as the archetypal bourgeois subjectivity obscure oppressive mechanisms operating in the heteronormative capitalist world? 2) What is the legacy of Robinson Crusoe after the global economic slump of 2007-8? 3) What kind of subjectivities signify the end of this neoclassical myth that begins with Robinson Crusoe? This section addresses these questions by examining *à la Robinson* subjectivity in detail.

The appropriation of Robinson Crusoe by mainstream economics as the embodiment of the asocial, self-interested, utility-maximizing, rational individual (*homo economicus*) resonates with dominant Western discourses of the body. Elizabeth Grosz

⁷⁹ Adam Smith, “On the Principle which gives occasion to the Division of Labour” in *The Wealth of Nations* (Book I), 1776. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-adam/works/wealth-of-nations/book01/ch02.htm> on February 07, 2013.

⁸⁰ Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)

argues that the field of philosophy was established on a profound *somatophobia*.⁸¹ In the metaphysical philosophy of Plato, the body was conceived of as “a betrayal of and a prison for soul, reason or mind”⁸² because it was associated with the feminine, irrational Other and the private sphere of social life. Because it is impossible to exist without a body, the proper body was conceived as the aristocratic warrior-king who embodies the masculine, rational self in the public sphere. The ideal body of the aristocratic warrior-king was disassociated from the markers of the feminine and lower classes, such as “birth and death, sweat and labour, menstruation and lactation,”⁸³ and was understood as a “repository of wisdom, courage and virtue.”⁸⁴ Drawing on Robinson Crusoe’s white, male, non-libidinal and upper-class body, mainstream economics perpetuates and further naturalizes classed, gendered and racialized exclusions in hegemonic Western discourses.

Only three women briefly appear in the novel: Crusoe’s mother, the widow of the captain who takes Crusoe to Guinea, and Crusoe’s wife. I argue that the lack of women in the novel represents the bourgeois imaginary of the day, as it does not recognize the existence of women in the public sphere of the market. Additionally, there is no overt mention of Crusoe’s intimacies with women, men or himself. However, Robinson Crusoe does not complain about his lack of sensuous and affective intimacies.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) 5.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 11.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

On the contrary, he celebrates and reproduces the aristocratic, heroic, self-sufficient conception of the ideal Western body: "... I was removed from all the wickedness of the world, here. *I had neither the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life.* I had nothing to covet; for I had all that I was now capable of enjoying; I was lord of the whole manor; ... I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of."⁸⁵

According to mainstream economists, Robinson Crusoe - a chimera of self-sufficiency - focuses on the problem

of how best to allocate labour time optimally between present and future consumption, whereupon imposing market relations onto both the labour he wishes to demand ... and the labour he is willing to supply ... , simultaneously maximiz[ing] his utility in consumption and eliminate[ing] all productive inefficiencies from the allocation.⁸⁶

As an economic agent divorced from the social, Robinson Crusoe makes decisions solely to maximize his interest and utility in both the short and long run. Therefore, his sense of temporality is subordinated to the instrumental rationality of the market that seeks ever-increasing production and efficiency, irrespective of the social conditions of production.⁸⁷ Considering this asocial economic determinism, feminist economist Ulla Grapard questions "what the story of a single, white, colonial, male - shipwrecked and

⁸⁵ Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, (New York: Penguin, 1965), 139. (Emphasis in original)

⁸⁶ Watson, 610.

⁸⁷ It is important here to remember my previous discussion of queer time. As Robinson Crusoe is constructed as the embodiment of the rational economic individual, temporal arrangements of the market become the normalized sense of temporality, which restricts the life possibilities of non-normative subjectivities living under capitalist regimes.

living alone on an island in the Caribbean for twenty-six years before he is joined by a 'savage' - can possibly tell us about modern economics.”⁸⁸ She asserts that this depiction of Robinson Crusoe as the universal rational human norm obscures the gendered dynamics of economic discourses that erase women from the field of economics, and trivializes “thoughts, feelings, achievements, and pleasures not related to an explicit economic advantage”⁸⁹ in socio-economic life.

The Robinson Crusoe archetype of mainstream economics also obscures the colonial relations and racial domination that structure dominant economic discourses. In a lecture he gave on Daniel Defoe in 1912, James Joyce wisely observes that:

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knife grinder, an astronomer, a backer, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races. The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity.⁹⁰

Here Joyce draws attention to the colonial relationship between Robinson Crusoe - who is the embodiment of the Western ideal of a desexualized, self-sufficient, rational being - and the 'savage' whom he names Friday and teaches to be 'civilized.' Robinson

⁸⁸ Ulla Grapard, “Robinson Crusoe: The Quintessential Economic Man?”, *Feminist Economics*, Vol.1, No. 1, (March 1995): 37-38.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 42-43.

⁹⁰ James Joyce, “Realism and Idealism in English Literature,” Lecture held at the Università Popolare, Trieste, Italy, February 1912. Retrived from <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/warner/courses/w00/eng130/RC3.00.htm> on February 07, 2013.

Crusoe often infantilizes Friday. He treats him as a child who is not yet a fully developed human being, equates him with emotions and irrationality, and feminizes him when describing his behaviours and appearance. In other words, Robinson Crusoe hierarchically constructs Friday as his inferior racial other, and attempts to inscribe in him the Western values of bourgeois respectability, comfort, and order.⁹¹ Yet, because Friday is a 'savage,' he is not entirely capable of learning these values. For instance, even though he learns to speak English, he is never able to speak 'proper' English.

Virginia Woolf also comments that Robinson Crusoe, " ... by reiterating that nothing but a plain earthenware pot stands in the foreground, persuades us to see remote islands and the solitudes of the human soul. By believing fixedly in the solidity of the pot and its earthiness, he has subdued every other element to his design."⁹² By directing "our attention to a productive metonymy between man and the thing he makes and to the possible limits of such metonymic figuring,"⁹³ Woolf captures the processes of reification that are the consequences of a capitalist mode of production, which requires the isolated, abstract individual's production. In this mode of production, human beings see their fellow humans as limits to their freedom, rather than as their own realization through relations of labour. In other words, because human beings are social beings, they can know themselves and others only when they relate to each other in affectionate

⁹¹ Virginia Woolf, "Robinson Crusoe," in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, 1935. Retrieved from <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301251h.html#e04> on February 07, 2013.

⁹² Virginia Woolf, "Robinson Crusoe," in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, 1935. Retrieved from <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301251h.html#e04> on February 07, 2013.

⁹³ Lydia H. Liu, "Robinson Crusoe's Earthenware Pot," *Critical Inquiry*, No. 25, Summer 1995. pp. 728-757. 729.

and sensuous ways. As abstract individualism necessarily closes down the possibility of relationality, the capitalist modes of production reject relationality as a mode of social relation. Consequently, social belonging actualized solely through the exchange of commodities. To put it differently, under capitalism “human properties, relations and actions” are transformed “into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things which have become independent ... of man and govern his life”⁹⁴ through the processes of reification.

Although critical thinkers like Joyce, Woolf and Grapard have analyzed the relations of domination between Robinson Crusoe and Friday, mainstream capitalist economists ignore them. When explaining the exchanges between characters, mainstream capitalist economists abstract the material relations of domination, exploitation and coercion that structure their relationship.⁹⁵ Instead, they tell a tale of “mutual benefit under conditions of equality, reciprocity, and freedom.”⁹⁶ By positing an equitable relationship divorced from the material conditions of life, mainstream capitalist economic discourses obscure the ways colonial and racial relations of socio-economic life.

To address the question of how heteronormative capitalism’s myth of origins obscures domination relations, it is important to focus on Robinson Crusoe’s

⁹⁴ Tom Bottomore (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, (Massachusetts: Harward University Press 1983), 462.

⁹⁵ Grapard, 34.

⁹⁶ Stephen Hymer, “Robinson Crusoe and The secret of Primitive Accumulation,” *Monthly Review*. Volume 63. Issue 04. September 2011. Retrieved from <http://monthlyreview.org/2011/09/01/robinson-crusoe-and-the-secret-of-primitive-accumulation> on February 07, 2013.

representation as the embodiment of the liberal Western human individualism, the normative bourgeois subject who lives in a social vacuum, constantly seeks the satisfaction of his/her self-interest, and maximizes his/her utility without regard for others. This reliance on Robinson Crusoe as *homo economicus* obscures the gendered, racial and colonial relations of the material world. The fictional claim of liberal equality erases the feminine, racial and classed others from the socio-economic imaginary, and therefore conceals and mystifies underlying patriarchal-heteronormative-colonial capitalist relations.

One of the first and strongest critics of this *à la Robinson* abstract individualism in which “individuals [are] taken out of historical context”⁹⁷ was Karl Marx, who raised historical and ontological objections to the notion of an isolated individual. For Marx, in Sean Sayers’ words, “the supposition of ... purely individual condition - the idea of a ‘state of nature’ which runs through eighteenth century liberal social thought - has no historical basis.”⁹⁸ To put it differently, the idea of a pre-societal human existence is empirically flawed because people have been living with their fellow human beings in mutually dependent societal organizations throughout history. As Marx asserts, human beings are essentially social beings: human beings are “no[t] abstract being[s] squatting outside the world.”⁹⁹ And “the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single

⁹⁷ Bottomore, 256.

⁹⁸ Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*, (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). 49.

⁹⁹ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843) Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm> on February 07, 2013.

individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.”¹⁰⁰

Unlike classical political economists who begin their analysis with Robinson-like hunters and fishers producing individually to satisfy their own needs and desires, Marx argues that “production by an isolated individual outside society ... is as much an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other.”¹⁰¹ Marx is making an ontological objection here. Labour is a process *between* human beings and nature, and the link between the given material conditions and their transformation.¹⁰² By organizing our relations to each other and nature, labour sets up the possibility of having our subjectivities. Therefore, production cannot simply be conceived as an instrumental activity. Rather, it is a *relational* activity in which human beings create each other through processes of labour. Consequently, the notion of isolated individuals producing alone is both historically and philosophically untenable.

The global economic slump of 2007-8 threw into question the abstract individualism of heteronormative capitalism. Since the eruption of the crisis, the world has been saturated with stories of human misery. Those suffering from these social injustices have demonstrated that Robinson Crusoe, as the self-sufficient, white, natural economic (hu)man, has never reflected the material everyday lives of suffering people. These lives, rather than reflecting Robinson Crusoe’s, inherit the legacy of Friday as his

¹⁰⁰ Karl Marx, “Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach,” in *Theses On Feuerbach* (1845). Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm> on February 07, 2013.

¹⁰¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Outline of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857). Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm> on February 07, 2013.

¹⁰² Karl Marx, *Capital I: A Critique of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin Books, 1976). 283-284.

grandchildren exploited by colonial capitalist domination. Our capitalist world is full of Friday's grandchildren, those 'othered' as classed, gendered, racialized, and sexualized subjects whose social positioning is "based on a division between superior and subordinate rather than a division between equals; and it is anything but peaceful."¹⁰³ The story that begins with Robinson Crusoe ends with Friday's grandchildren. Therefore, as Hymer suggests, the stories of Friday's grandchildren need be told. I suggest that Billy Casper, Billy Elliot and Kevin are marginalized by dominant discourses of class, gender and sexuality, and consequently explore them as Friday's grandchildren. In the following section I concentrate on Kevin's story, after briefly demonstrating how abstract individualism was maintained in the economic settings in which Billy Casper and Billy Elliot are situated.

3.3.2 KEVIN'S VILLAGE

In Billy Casper's era, the KWNS systematically and largely successfully upheld the norms of the market. Its social policies obscured dominant gendered, racial and colonial relations, leaving normative bourgeois subjectivity intact. For instance, the family-wage system constructs family as a heterosexual unit in which "the husband/father is supposed to be the exclusive breadwinner and the wife/mother [is] responsible for the large quantities of unpaid domestic labour."¹⁰⁴ Consequently,

¹⁰³ Stephen Hymer, "Robinson Crusoe and The secret of Primitive Accumulation."

¹⁰⁴ Linda Gordon, "The Welfare State: Towards a Socialist-Feminist Perspective," *Socialist Register*, Vol. 26, (1990): 183.

“women’s paid work is considered subsidiary to their private domestic role,”¹⁰⁵ and working women are paid low wages. This gendered economic inequality structures the poverty of women who are not a part of heteronormative families, such as Billy’s mother. The sexist social policies of KWNS also undermine equal citizenship between women and men by consolidating the private/public divide. They construct men as “first-class citizens whose duties are performed in the public sphere and women, whose roles are displayed in the private/domestic sphere, are treated as second-class citizens.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, an economically privileged masculine Robinson Crusoesque subjectivity was maintained and sustained during the KWNS era. Billy Casper is excluded from this ideal subjectivity because he is a working-class boy who does not belong to a heteronormative family. When the economic dynamics of this era were dismantled by the petrol crisis and, the demise of the Bretton Woods system, a neoliberal mode of governance became the dominant economic model in Western countries.

Billy Elliot’s story is situated in the early days of this new era. As opposed to the KWNS’ social policies, neoliberal governance prevented the direct intervention of the state into individual lives. Instead, by implementing a range of strategies to “govern society at a distance,”¹⁰⁷ ideologies of individualization and privatization urged

¹⁰⁵ MeeSok Park, Jeong-Won Han, and In-Ja Song, “Gender and the Welfare State: The British Feminist Critiques,” *Journal of Korean Home Economics Association English Edition*, Vol. 3, No. 1 pp: 73-94. December 2002. p. 89.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Rationalities of Government*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996),14.

individuals regardless of their class, gender, race and sexuality to transcend their given material conditions through hard work and obedience to the imperatives of the market. No systemic impediment was recognized in the journey to self-betterment. It was simply a matter of individual effort and responsibility. This myth of individual responsibility invokes Defoe's demand of individual compliance to the existing social order. Just as neoliberal subjects can progress as long as they internalize the given social regime, "the English middle classes could continue to enjoy the economic benefits which flowed from established social hierarchies only by choosing to do nothing to destabilise them politically."¹⁰⁸

Social movements that emerged after the global economic slump of 2007-8, including student protests in Chile and Montréal, the Arab Spring, the European Summer, the Occupy Protests, and Idle No More, demonstrate that the ideology of abstract individualism faces a crisis of legitimacy. Instead of aspiring to be Robinsonades who subscribe to and respect the existing discriminatory socio-political order, many people all around the globe are attempting to change restrictive socio-economic regimes. Activist interventions have provided a site for the performance of non-normative subjectivities in the streets and squares, and have showed that many people marginal to capitalist economics are not willing to remain excluded from the public sphere of social life. By disrupting the public/private divide, they are queering and carving out a social space for non-Robinson-like subjectivities.

Boys Village foregrounds queer time and space at the moment when the myth of

¹⁰⁸ Watson, 610.

abstract individualism comes under challenge by subjugated socio-political-sexual discourses. At this historical conjuncture, which oscillates between tradition and future possibilities, *Boys Village* tells the stories of Friday's grandchildren, especially of Kevin. The film provides an aesthetic representation of Kevin's production of a new queer history under shifting capitalist material conditions.

Boys Village is set in this reified world where capitalism and heterosexualized desire¹⁰⁹ acquire absolute self-sufficiency, because of the mystification of social relations, "capital insists that it gives birth to itself ... without any mediation of labour"¹¹⁰ as the main organizer of economic relations. Similarly, heterosexualized desire is conceived to be a universal, natural and autonomous human essence, organizing the social relations of human beings. Being the *modus operandi* of social life, (heterosexualized) desire is rendered independent of concrete bodies. It "no longer names a relation between embodied" subjects, but rather "a relation between desiring and desired positions."¹¹¹ In other words, reified desire gains ontological primacy, and dominates people's intimacies with each other by constructing sexual identity categories.¹¹² As a categorical opposition, the heterosexual/homosexual binary is

¹⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Power of Life: Theories in Subjectivity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135.

¹¹⁰ McNally, 2001, 12.

¹¹¹ Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 63.

¹¹² For the socio-historical construction of sexual identity categories see: John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stanstell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Michel Foucault, *The History of*

produced through this reification of desire within the heterosexual matrix, which bestows intelligibility on people whose “sex, gender and desire cohere within a framework structured by heterosexuality.”¹¹³ As a result of the simultaneous operations of reified sexual and social relationship, the heteronormative capitalist matrix jettisons queers of colours, working-class queers, indigenous people, people living with AIDS, and immigrants from the normative socio-symbolic order of life,¹¹⁴ leaving the white, male, non-libidinal and upper-class body of Robinson Crusoe as the ideal normative subject.

In this heteronormative capitalist world, Kevin, like Robinson Crusoe, is an isolated individual. However, rather than being a rational autonomous male, Kevin is embodied as a gendered, sexualized, labouring and libidinal subject. He is a queer working-class child. He is an exile from a society organised by heteronormativity and capitalism. When he says to one of his dolls “no, they haven’t ... because I say so ... they will pick me up eventually,” we know that he is cognizant of the world outside Boy’s Village to which he wants to return. Kevin also realizes that the only way to be included into society is to interact with other members of society. He does not celebrate

Sexuality, Vol. I. (New York: Vintage, 1978); Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹¹³ Anita Brady and Tony Schirato, *Understanding Judith Butler*, (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011), 43.

¹¹⁴ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, And The Attack on Democracy*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Wendy Peters, “Pink Dollars, White Collars: *Queer as Folk*, Valuable Viewers, and the Price of Gay TV,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 28.3, (2011): 193-212; Katherine Sender, “Queens for a Day: Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and the Neoliberal Project,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (June 2006): 131-151.

his isolated status as Robinson Crusoe does, who utters that well known line: “I was lord of the whole manor; ... I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of.”¹¹⁵

Unlike the alienated worlds in which Billy Casper and Billy Elliot live, Kevin’s is abstracted from family, school, and other institutions. I suggest that the high level of isolation in Kevin’s social world signifies the high degree of alienation in Boy’s Village. To escape his isolation, Kevin interacts with the space of the village through a series of actions that domesticate it. By creating an alternative world peopled by dolls and other objects through which he constructs a non-normative sense of order and sociability, he re-imagines his isolation. However, Kevin is not left entirely to his own devices in this world for long, as local teenagers visit the abandoned summer camp. These teenagers are also Friday’s grandchildren; they visit the village as a way to escape from the grinding monotony of their life in the nearby town, and to explore a space that has now become a hideaway for illicit adventures. Boy’s Village, then, provides the teenagers a space in which heteronormative capitalism is no longer in effect. Evacuated of their subjectivity by the conditions of alienation¹¹⁶, the teenagers utilize the village as an opportunity to breathe and articulate a loss of the self in various ways. Primarily, they express loss through anger by destroying and vandalizing village space. In so doing, they replicate and project the neoliberal violence they experience in their everyday lives, but now as *subjects* of violence that claim agency, visibility and

¹¹⁵ Defoe, 1965, 139.

¹¹⁶ Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s conception of man in capitalist society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

power in village space. They also silently sniff glue after school, and materially inscribe their sense of loss on the walls of decrepit buildings by writing: “You’re next.” This phrase seems to suggest at least three meanings.

First of all, “you’re next” conveys a message to visitors and passersby that “you and your living spaces will be rendered obsolete someday due to processes of neoliberal reconstructions!” Second, displaying boredom and alienation, the teenagers declare that “you will be subjected to a severe alienation within heteronormative capitalism, and will end up in an abandoned space where you hope to alleviate these feelings of alienation, just as we do!” Recalling Woolf’s observation about Robinson Crusoe’s earthenware pot, “you’re next” indicates the “remote islands and the solitudes of the human soul.”¹¹⁷ Third, considering the eventual death of the teenage intruder and Kevin’s isolation, the phrase foreshadows that “you will be trapped and incarcerated in your own desire, which is not recognized by the heteronormative matrix!”

This entrapment in non-normative desire leads us to the relationship between Kevin and the teenage intruder. One interpretation evoked by the film is that these two characters are representations of the same person existing in different temporalities. This temporal split represents heteronormative capitalism’s effects on queer working-class children. As evidence of this temporal split, the only visiting teenager aware of and respectful of Kevin’s handmade dolls, wind chimes, ornaments, and other ritualistic elements is the group’s leader, who dies after receiving Kevin’s tender kiss. He is the

¹¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, “Robinson Crusoe,” in *The Common Reader: Second Series*, 1935. Retrieved from <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301251h.html#e04> on February 07, 2013.

only person who hears and sees Kevin, albeit only after the fatal kiss. Moreover, Kevin's attention and desire to be recognized is directed only at him. This evidence suggests that Kevin's ghostly existence represents the childhood of the teenager. Kevin represents the teenager's queer childhood before his interpellation into the heteronormative capitalist matrix.

Through the disciplinary processes of heteronormative capitalist institutions such as family and school, non-normative children are subjected to the normative ideals of the existing society. Within the liberal Western imaginary, "reproduction and generationality are the main vehicles by which the national future can be figured."¹¹⁸ Therefore, abstract children who are divorced from their class, race and desire, and imagined to become Robinsonades, function as gatekeepers of heteronormative capitalist nation states. These normative children embody "the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good."¹¹⁹ On the other hand, children who resist this preordained normative way of life (e.g. Billy Casper, Billy Elliot, and Kevin) are considered to be a part of the "dangerous classes" that constitute "peril[s] to the social order,"¹²⁰ and are often depicted in the cultural

¹¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, "Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material)," in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (eds.), *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 58.

¹¹⁹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

¹²⁰ Michael Moon, "'The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes': Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger," in (eds.) Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11.

imaginary as violent and sexualized “gothic children.”¹²¹

This is *teenage Kevin’s* story of subjection to the heteronormative capitalist matrix. As a result of this process, he is an intelligible subject within the socio-symbolic order, albeit highly alienated. Because children “have not yet been educated into accepting ... routine social practices”¹²² as fixed and immovable aspects of the world, heteronormativity and capitalism “cannot ever *fully* colonise the hearts and minds of children.”¹²³ Therefore, I argue that *young Kevin* represents the non-colonized, unintelligible personal history of the queer child, on the way to becoming a teenager. Kevin’s earth-coloured school uniform signifies the processes of subjection he went through, and because he is a jettisoned queer being, the uniform also represents the failed attempt of subjection to heteronormative capitalism.

Opened as a summer camp for working-class children, Boy’s Village offers a space for Kevin to realize his productive and sensuous capacities without being marked as *abnormal* by the rigid heteronormative capitalist matrix of social life. As an escape from the normative flow of the life, at camp, capitalist values of life that mainly involve “market exchange and strictly private ownership of the required facilities”¹²⁴ are usually suspended. Unlike *à la Robinson* economies where self-seeking individuals work to satisfy their own needs and desires without regard to others’ needs and desires, the spirit

¹²¹ Ellis Hanson, “Knowing Children: Desire and Interpretation in *The Exorcist*,” in (eds.) Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

¹²² Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 34.

¹²³ Sue Ferguson, “Toys, Capitalism, and Commodification: Fantasy or Myth?” *Historical Materialism Conference* (Toronto: 2008) Unpublished conference paper.

¹²⁴ G.A. Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 6.

of camps is characterized by collectivity, reciprocity and relationality, which allow for the development of unalienated social ties.

In the alienated and reified *normal world*, people are hindered from engaging with each other in sensuous ways outside the heteronormative matrix. However, at camp physical intimacies between same-sex people such as “hugging, kissing, giving each other back rubs, and holding hands,”¹²⁵ are sometimes acceptable without falling out of the heteronormative matrix. In other words, the original Boy’s Village, as a space in which normative boundaries are transgressed, enables Kevin (and other queer working-class children) to enact a non-normative subjectivity. Yet, with the new epidemic of privatization in the 1980s, Boy’s Village was no longer publicly promoted and funded. Instead, private holiday resorts and their ultra-surveilled social environments become more popular. A summer vacation in these resorts was not affordable for the working-classes; therefore, these private holiday resorts did not constitute an alternative space to publicly funded summer camps. The shift from publicly funded summer camps to private holiday resorts decreased spaces of working-class childhood. Relatedly, the possibilities of asserting queer (non-normative) ontologies became more limited for working-class queer children. As a result, the personal history of Kevin got entrapped in Boy’s Village.

The last scene of the film represents an encounter with Kevin’s past and present. After being rejected by a girl, teenage Kevin feels obligated to confront his past, in

¹²⁵ Kathryn R. Kent, ““No Trespassing”: Girl Scout Camp and the Limits of the Counterpublic Sphere,” in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (eds.), *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 177.

particular his suppressed and exiled desires that continue to draw him to the village. In pursuit of his past that does not pass by, teenage Kevin runs after little Kevin. This game of tag takes them through the village, the space of their history. When the two Kevins finally meet in the dark, underground space, little Kevin kisses the teenager on the lips. At this moment, teenage Kevin dies while little Kevin becomes intelligible. Acknowledging his forbidden history, teenage Kevin metaphorically says: “I was a queer child,” recognizing little Kevin’s desire and rendering him visible. However, this brief moment of visibility and acknowledgment of queer desire requires an actual or symbolic death. I speculate that this death symbolizes how heteronormative capitalism recognizes subjects as long as they exist in a reified dichotomy, such as heterosexual / homosexual. According to the rigid heteronormative capitalist logic, Kevin cannot occupy the heterosexual category and receive the kiss at the same time. Therefore, Kevin’s long-awaited kiss becomes “a gravestone marker”¹²⁶ for his own death, and queerness is constituted as a necessary murder, evoking Oscar Wilde’s famous verse: “*For each man kills the thing he loves, Yet each man does not die.*”¹²⁷

Bewildered by the death of the teenager, the reborn Kevin invokes Benjamin’s description of *Angelus Novus*, the angel of history. From Robinson Crusoe’s island to Boy’s Village, Kevin “sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon

¹²⁶ Kathryn Bond Stockton, “Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal,” in Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley (eds.), *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 283.

¹²⁷ Oscar Wilde, “A Ballad of Reading Gaol,” (1897) Retrieved from <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/wilde/prisonwritings.html> on February 09, 2013.

wreckage.”¹²⁸ He “would like to stay, awaken the dead,”¹²⁹ yet the beep of the car propels him out of his isolation and back into a broader societal existence outside the village. At this point, we do not know what will happen to Kevin in the future; all we know is that he carved out a space for his history in the future, and he will carry the death of the teenager with him in to the future.

3.4 QUEERING *BOYS VILLAGE*

Despite the fact that the normative world in which *Boys Village* is set makes death a necessary condition of being queer (“at this point of death, a gay child is born, even if one is eighteen or forty-five”¹³⁰), Kevin resists being victimized. I argue that Kevin uses a queer aesthetic sensibility to reclaim the space of neoliberal devastation and domesticate it through his affective relationship with objects. Throughout the film Kevin collects stones, debris of the village, shrubs, yarn and other found objects. He transforms them through play and talk, and by projecting his hopes, dreams and fears onto them. He actively develops queer time and space in the abandoned village, which enables Kevin to queer the normative flow of the socio-symbolic order, and to carve out a space for himself.

As Kevin orders stones in particular configurations, he generates new meanings and inscribes his non-normative existence on the normative world to become

¹²⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257-258.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 158.

intelligible. When the teenager intruders visit the village, they repeatedly *unorder* Kevin's unintelligible world. But Kevin does not give up. He reorders the village, recreating classroom environments and religious spaces common to a normative world. In so doing, he does not simply seek assimilation into the normative world. Rather, as social spaces are constructed through the exclusion and inclusion of marginalized practices and bodies, Kevin disrupts, challenges, and transforms these disciplinary spaces by incorporating himself within traditional scenes. Nevertheless, the alienated teenagers destroy Kevin's reordering of the world, which they seem to conceive as a mere replica of the existing normative socio-spatial order.

The difference between Kevin's and the teenagers' modes of intervention also exemplifies Kevin's queer subjectivity. In the world of the teenager intruders, the hegemonic mode of insurgence is Oedipal revolt that is heteronormative at the outset. In this mode of intervention, subjects articulate their anger and frustration against phallic authorities (family, school, police and other ideological state apparatuses, or the heteronormative capitalist matrix itself) as a simple reversal of given symbolic meanings. In contrast, Kevin's queer mode of intervention rejects being locked into the same Oedipal logic through a simple reversal. Instead, Kevin is concerned with the formation of new meanings under given socio-spatial arrangements, as well as deformation of the normative meanings in the symbolic realm.

In addition to reordering the village by queering normative economic and sexual regimes, Kevin engages in non-heteronormative modes of reproduction. He makes dolls with which he has sensuous and affective relations. In an imaginative realm that is not bound to dominant orders, Kevin's relationships to the dolls open up possibilities for

negotiating desire, identity and social relations. While Kevin's relationships with the dolls bear traces of the normative social world in which he was raised, Kevin twists them relations with a queer touch. For instance, after one of the teenagers sits on and damages one of his dolls, Kevin talks to the doll: "I told you to be more careful. I can't always help you. You have to learn to look after yourself." These words are familiar from the state and Robinsonades immersed in the neoliberal telos of self-responsibility. However, Kevin seems not to believe the neoliberal creed; his comments to the doll are marked by empathetic identification and pain on behalf of the mangled figure. This incongruence constitutes another instance of queering normative regimes of power.

Another doll, which is made of a piece of fabric that belongs to the leader's t-shirt, represents Kevin's queer desire. He carries this doll everywhere, calling it "pretty boy." As Kevin watches his teenage alter-ego kiss a girl, he becomes very upset and stabs the doll. This doll, when found by the teenage Kevin, turns into the symbolic recognition of his own queer desire. Placing the teenager's corpse between this doll and a decomposed human skull, the last scene highlights the importance of this doll as the symbol of queer desire that is destined to die under heteronormative capitalism.

To conclude, in this chapter I first examined mainstream capitalist economists' ideological appropriation of Robinson Crusoe, and explored how this use obscures classed, gendered, and colonial relations of domination in heteronormative capitalist societies. Second, I investigated the ways in which this normative subjectivity was perpetuated in the economic context in which Billy Casper and Billy Elliot live to marginalize non-normative subjects. Third, I showed how the abstract individualist capitalist origin myth was challenged by a working class boy's queer aesthetic labour.

Throughout this tripartite investigation, I analyzed the violence perpetuated by heteronormative capitalist regimes of power in queer working class children's lives.

CHAPTER FOUR:

A QUEER FEELING: NOSTALGIA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters, I develop an anti-capitalist queer reading of *Kes*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Boys Village* to explore the interplay between the economic and sexual regimes that shape representations of working-class boys' sexuality and subjectivity in post World War II Britain. I examine how the governance strategies of the Keynesian welfare nation state and heteronormativity limit Billy Casper's (*Kes*) life possibilities, and how the aggressive rise of neoliberalism, hegemonic masculinity, and heterosexism renders the mining town of Everington a stifling container for Billy Elliot. I also scrutinize how Kevin, in *Boys Village*, reconfigures the normative 'Robinson Crusoe subjectivity' of heteronormative capitalism. My analysis highlights the ways in which these queer working-class boys resist the heteronormative-reproductive and capitalist-productive matrices. These children, I argue, are represented as actively and consciously creating queer times and spaces to renegotiate the rigid boundaries of normative regimes of power. In discussing these queer times and spaces, I describe the aesthetic strategies employed by queer children to create non-normative temporalities and spatialities, and then analyze the multiple meanings of their aesthetic labour.

In this chapter, I revisit those queer times and spaces through the analytic lens of longing, belonging and nostalgia. I argue that in resisting and disrupting the rigid matrix of heteronormative capitalism, Billy Casper, Billy Elliot and Kevin are motivated by these emotions. These protagonists carve out spaces where they create alternative

temporalities and spatialities, which challenge the exclusionary socio-symbolic order of their time. In other words, these queer working-class children express a common *longing to belong* to the social world. Senses of longing and belonging, therefore, are crucial themes in this chapter. The scenes where queer times and spaces emerge are depicted through deeply nostalgic visual and narrative strategies, which merit further examination. In particular, the atmosphere of *Boys Village* - the most recent of the three films - is profoundly nostalgic. I argue that the co-presence of nostalgia and queer times and spaces in these films is not a mere coincidence. Rather, longing, belonging and nostalgia are constitutive elements of queer times and spaces.

My aim, then, is to investigate the ways in which longing, belonging and nostalgia are crucial to constituting queer times and spaces through the aesthetic labour of queer working-class children. The first section of this chapter explains the concept of nostalgia, including its history and multiple meanings, which I extend the analysis of nostalgia to queer times and spaces. In section two, I identify the aesthetic uses of nostalgia in these films as they relate to the protagonists' feelings of longing and belonging. The third section illustrates how nostalgia *queers* normative sexual and economic regimes. In so doing, I also queer the notion of nostalgia itself, which is often understood as an anti-modern sentiment.

4.2 NOSTALGIA: AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

One of the most eloquent definitions of nostalgia can be found in Milan Kundera's acclaimed novel *Ignorance*, a poignant love story of two émigrés who return home after twenty years: "The Greek word for 'return' is *nostos*. *Algos* means

‘suffering.’ So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return.”¹³¹ Kundera adds, “nostalgia seems something like the pain of ignorance, of not knowing. You are far away, and I don’t know what has become of you. My country is far away, and I don’t know what is happening there.”¹³²

The word nostalgia is a neologism coined in 1688 by the young Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer. Hofer utilized the term to describe a medical condition of acute homesickness.¹³³ People diagnosed with nostalgia usually had been displaced from their homelands. Soldiers, students, and servants were said to “lose touch with the present”¹³⁴ and confuse “real and imaginary events.”¹³⁵ Therefore, “the preferred cure” for its victims “was to get the patient home as fast as possible.”¹³⁶

By the nineteenth century, nostalgia became “a public epidemic.”¹³⁷ More and more people suffered from it. Yet, “because the rise of pathologic anatomy and bacteriology had simply made it less medically credible,”¹³⁸ these people were not diagnosed with a physical illness. As a result of the demedicalization of nostalgia, a semantic shift occurred,¹³⁹ and nostalgia came to describe a condition in which one longs for a lost spatio-temporal particularity. With this shift nostalgia became a

¹³¹ Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), 5.

¹³² Ibid. 6.

¹³³ Linda Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern,” Retrieved from <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>, on March 20, 2013.

¹³⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, (New York Basic Books, 2001), 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Rachel Moore, *Hollis Frampton (nostalgia)*, (London: Afterall Books, 2006), 8.

¹³⁷ Boym, 6.

¹³⁸ Hutcheon, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern.”

¹³⁹ Ibid.

generalized sentiment, and disciplines such as literature and philosophy began to take it up as their subject matter.¹⁴⁰ The scholarship on nostalgia emphasizes that by the nineteenth century nostalgia was no longer understood in a narrow medical sense; it permeated other aspects of social life. Yet, the reasons why nostalgia became a common sentiment are not well investigated. This question is crucial to an anti-capitalist queer reading of nostalgia.¹⁴¹ So, in what follows, I conduct an historical investigation of the material conditions that shaped this semantic shift.

After the invention of nostalgia as a dangerous disease, the Western world experienced the *dual revolution*: the (British) Industrial Revolution (1780-1830) and the French Revolution (1789).¹⁴² The Industrial Revolution was the total transformation of the production process. Previously, the British economy was agrarian, and manufacturing was heavily dependent on small-scale labour-intensive production where the extraction of surplus value had serious limitations, such as the legal length of a working day. By introducing improved technology, machinery, the steam engine, and

¹⁴⁰ Georg Lukács argues that the form of the novel is “an expression of ... transcendental homelessness” in *The Theory of Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (1914), retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/theory-novel/ch02.htm> on March 20, 2013. And the early German Romantic philosopher Novalis famously declares: “Philosophy is really homesickness – *the desire to be everywhere at home*.” In *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), xxv.

¹⁴¹ In *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Roland Barthes asks “who will write the history of tears? In which societies, in which eras, have we wept? ... Why was ‘sensibility,’ at a certain moment, transformed into sentimentality?” As we will see, this investigation about nostalgia is also important to the history of tears, and it is related to a thorough history of the grandchildren of Friday. Yet, the task of writing a history of tears is far beyond the scope of the present project. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 180-181.

¹⁴² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

large-scale production methods, the Industrial Revolution radically transformed the agrarian rural economy into an industrialized urban economy. This new economy increased productivity by deploying advanced technology in large-scale production units, like factories. Increased productivity for the capitalist meant the reduction of necessary labour time in the production process of a certain commodity. It was newly possible to extract more surplus value from the working-class without lengthening the working day and paying them more. But this new large-scale production required more workers to be sustainable. In particular, the operational code of the industrial economy required “regular unbroken daily work,” a process that was utterly different from pre-industrial agrarian production where workers were used to “the seasonal ups and downs of the farm.”¹⁴³ Thus, the realization of revolutionary technological change in production was bound to the expropriation of the agrarian population and to their discipline in relation to the imperatives of the new production processes.

As one of the main actors in this revolutionary transformation, the state facilitated the migration of the agrarian population into urban areas. The new Poor Law of 1834 was a crucial tool “designed to make life so intolerable for the rural paupers and to force them to migrate to any jobs that offered”¹⁴⁴ in urban areas. Additionally, the Corn Laws, which was originally introduced “to protect farming against the post-1815 crisis,”¹⁴⁵ were abolished in 1846. As a result of these juridical regulations, hundreds of thousands of people were divorced from “the ownership of the conditions

¹⁴³ Ibid. 49.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 153.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 48.

of ... [their] own labour ... [and] the means of production,”¹⁴⁶ and thereby forced to emigrate to the urban areas where they could sell their labour-power to the bourgeoisie. In industrial cities, “a separate territory [was] assigned to”¹⁴⁷ the newcomers, “the worst houses in the worst quarters of the towns ... where the working-class [was] crowded together ... No human being could possibly wish to live”¹⁴⁸ there.

In the context of the Industrial Revolution, nostalgia became a public epidemic and a general sentiment among the masses of Western Europe. Experiencing a radical rupture in the organization of their everyday lives, people longed for the familiarity of traditional communities and non-capitalistic spatio-temporal organization. This longing was twofold: a spatial longing for home in rural areas, and a temporal longing for a life outside the “new time-discipline”¹⁴⁹ imposed by “the new labour habits”¹⁵⁰ of industrial capitalism that were in utter harmony with normative heterosexuality, as working-class families were expected constantly to produce and reproduce the labour force needed to maintain the new production regime. Longing was a reality of life that found various expressions in many cultural productions of the time. For instance, Ferdinand Raimund’s plays are full of sorrow; homesickness is the main theme of Joseph von

¹⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital I: A Critique of Political Economy*. (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 874-5.

¹⁴⁷ Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/condition-working-class/ch04.htm> on March 21, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, No. 38 (Dec., 1967): 90.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Eichendorff's lyrics; spleen is the main theme in Charles Baudelaire's poetry; and the agony of uprooting is apparent in Franz Schubert's music.¹⁵¹

Then the French Revolution erupted in 1789. While the (British) Industrial Revolution created the hegemonic production model of the new industrial capitalism, the French Revolution constituted its political and ideological grounds.¹⁵² The social order of the *ancien régime*, in which everyone was subject to the King, was irreversibly changed. The revolution established bourgeois liberal democracy, and “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” was the tripartite motto of the new regime. Unfortunately, this motto did not mean the liberty and equality of all; it only meant the liberty and equality of bourgeois liberal subjects.¹⁵³ In other words, *liberté, égalité, fraternité* was the slogan of mainstream economics and utilitarian philosophy's abstract individualism. The ideological representation of this normative, universalized *à la Robinson* subjectivity was indeed an erasure of the subjectivities of Friday's grandchildren.

The dual revolution radically transformed the ways that people experienced their everyday lives -- where they lived, how they organized their quotidian habits, their relationship to the state as new citizens, and so on. As a result of these transformations, “the idea of progress through revolution ... became central to the nineteenth-century culture.”¹⁵⁴ Increased productivity, participation in the market economy as ‘free’ labourers, and equality before the law were important examples of this sense of progress. In spite of these progressive features, the majority of the population was

¹⁵¹ Hobsbawm, 121-264-274.

¹⁵² Hobsbawm, 53.

¹⁵³ Hobsbawm, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Boym, 9.

disoriented, cut off from their lands, history, and traditions. This disorientation resulted in an epidemic of nostalgia, a longing for the lost land, history and traditions “which had been badly bruised by the turmoil of the times.”¹⁵⁵ However, longing for the past and looking back was incompatible with the fever of progress that includes a strong sense of futurity. In the progressive zeitgeist, nostalgia was understood negatively: “it was the predicament of Lot’s wife, a fear that looking back might paralyze you forever, turning you into a pillar of salt, a pitiful monument to your own grief.”¹⁵⁶

This negative perception of nostalgia is present in contemporary humanities and social sciences literatures. Critics who focus on longings for an idealized past charge nostalgia with “falsifying the past; severing the past from the present; fostering disillusionment with the present; ... hindering attempts to improve present circumstances; ... commodifying history; and exploiting emotions for profit.”¹⁵⁷ These criticisms overlook the multiple meanings and uses of nostalgia. While I agree that scholars should be aware of the dangers of displacing “history proper with the history of aesthetic styles,”¹⁵⁸ I think a more thorough analysis of nostalgia is warranted. In mainstream cinema, nostalgia is often associated with processes of displacement that

¹⁵⁵ Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 107.

¹⁵⁶ Boym, xv.

¹⁵⁷ Christine Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film*, (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 31.

¹⁵⁸ Sprengler, 2.

are accomplished mainly through two aesthetic styles¹⁵⁹: (a) *discursive distancing*, a process in which the signs of exploitation are represented as if they pertain to pre-modern rather than contemporary times, and (b) *discursive nostalgia*, a process in which operations of power are dismissed by the idealized representations of a certain community as happy and harmonious.¹⁶⁰

Despite the ways representations of nostalgia have been used for purposes that undermine any analysis of relations of power, I argue that it is important to explore nostalgia from a range of alternative perspectives. For instance, Svetlana Boym distinguishes *restorative nostalgia* from *reflective nostalgia*. According to Boym, “[r]estorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.”¹⁶¹ Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, “dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance.”¹⁶² The former is concerned with the reinstatement of origins, while the latter refigures the ruins of what has been lost. Thus while restorative nostalgia mystifies the past as an ideal way of life, reflective nostalgia critically reflects on the past as a way of creating new possibilities for life now and in the future. The former burns with revenge, while the latter seeks redemption. “If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of

¹⁵⁹ The use of these styles is more common in mainstream cinema because of its “growing preoccupation with memory and nostalgia” over the last few decades. In Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 1.

¹⁶⁰ Isar Godreau, “Changing Space, Making Race: Distance, Nostalgia, and the Folklorization of Blackness in Puerto Rico.” *Identities: Global Studies on Culture and Power*. 9.3. (2002): 281- 304.

¹⁶¹ Boym, 41.

¹⁶² Ibid.

home and homeland in attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space.”¹⁶³

Drawing on Boym’s typology, I am interested in analyzing the working of nostalgia in *Kes*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Boys Village* in the following section. I argue that while *Kes* and *Billy Elliot* do not have overarching nostalgic tones in their narration,¹⁶⁴ nostalgia pervades certain scenes in these films. I suggest that in *Kes* and *Billy Elliot*, the restorative/reflective nostalgia binary is meaningful because it overlaps with the ways that the characters organize their everyday lives around binary oppositions. On the other hand, the restorative/reflective nostalgia binary is unhelpful in expressing the complexity of *Boys Village*, which has an overt nostalgic tone; Kevin expresses his queer subjectivity by constantly forming and deforming the meanings of binary oppositions -- recasting the binaries as two tendencies of a dynamic process of meaning.

4.3 NOSTALGIA IN *KES*, *BILLY ELLIOT*, AND *BOYS VILLAGE*

4.3.1 *KES*

In *Kes*, each character displays nostalgic attachments and sentiments for different spatio-temporal arrangements. When Billy’s mother talks about her life, she is nostalgic about the past. During a party, she shares her frustrations with a friend; she longs for the times when Billy’s father still belong to their family, and thinks that if her husband were with them, Billy and his brother (Jud) would have a better chance in life.

¹⁶³ Boym, 49.

¹⁶⁴ I use the term ‘narration’ in its broader meaning that includes the film’s setting, characters, themes, plot and structure, tone, and point of view.

Billy would cease being “a hopeless case,” Jud would be more respectful and well-behaved, and they all would have better material conditions of living. Even though there is no evidence that life was better with her husband, Billy’s mother idealizes this imagined past as the absolute truth about their life, and works to restore this mythical ideal in the future. In this pursuit, she tries to convince her boyfriend to marry. In so doing, she represents an example of restorative nostalgia. She sees the dominant nuclear family model, in which the male breadwinner is the head of household, as the quintessential ‘good life.’ She wishes to reconstruct this model for her children and herself. This instance of (restorative) nostalgia overlooks complex operations of power by representing the past as joyful and harmonious. In longing for the lost heterosexual nuclear family, the primary ideological unit of the Keynesian welfare nation state, she misrecognizes that she presently suffers from the socio-juridical regulations of heteronormative capitalism that systematically oppresses and renders her unintelligible as a single mother.

Jud has nostalgic attachments as well. He yearns for his father’s patriarchal authority that would prevent his mother from working and having boyfriends, and prepare Billy to be a properly masculine miner. Jud strives to reinstate this patriarchal authority by aggressively surveying his mother’s sexuality. For instance, Jud and his mother fight before a party because he tries to restore patriarchal authority over his mother. Jud exercises this oppressive power over his brother as well; he mistreats and abuses him throughout the film. His most violent act is to kill Billy’s kestrel Kes

because he intuits that the bird is “more than simply a pet for Billy,”¹⁶⁵ it is “a symbol of freedom and spiritual affirmation in a world of cruelty and willed indifference.”¹⁶⁶ In a vengeful moment, orchestrated to subjugate Billy, Jud kills Kes, the only thing that brings Billy joy in the stifling matrix of heteronormative capitalism. This scene illustrates how restorative nostalgic attachments can be exploitative in their pursuit of reinstating origins.

In *Kes*, the most profound nostalgia emerges at the moments when Billy is with his kestrel. Queer times and spaces, as I explain in the first chapter, are created through Billy’s interaction with Kes. Nostalgia becomes intermingled with queer times and spaces in *Kes*. Queer times and spaces emerge when the spatio-temporal referents of heteronormative capitalism are less visible: for instance, when Billy is not in school, after school, before going home, and mostly in the countryside away from mines, factories, schools and houses, the heterosexualized capitalist spaces of everyday life. Each of these spaces and times are tinged with a queer nostalgia, but particularly when Billy goes into the countryside to play with his kestrel. In these moments, the scenes are “[a]bbetted by a very late-Sixties soundtrack of strings and trilling flute,”¹⁶⁷ and when “the natural light and dappled textures of Chris Menges’s cinematography provide a blessed tonal contrast to the grimly rundown backdrops of the rest of the film.”¹⁶⁸ Here,

¹⁶⁵ Chris Darke, “Why *Kes*, Ken Loach’s tale of a working-class boy who raises a kestrel, is an English classic?” (2007) Retrieved from <http://www.filmcomment.com/article/encore-kes> on April 11, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Philip French, “Kes – review,” *The Observer* (September 11, 2011.) Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/sep/11/kes-ken-loach-review> on April 11, 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Billy longs for a particular spatio-temporal arrangement that goes beyond the rigid boundaries of heteronormative capitalism that would position him as a pitman who is the head of a heterosexual household.

Billy's interest in the countryside should be seen as a manifestation of this longing, not a naïve escape to nature. When he creates queer times and spaces, his yearning body is extended in history. I previously argued that by training the kestrel, Billy connects to the pre-industrial peasant classes because in the past kestrels were the only type of falcons that could be trained by those in the agrarian classes. In the same way, when Billy ventures into the woods to escape the heteronormative capitalist matrix, he connects with the history of those who were taken away from their lands and thrown into urbanized city centres during the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, his longing body is doubled historically.¹⁶⁹ He both expresses his yearning for a world that is not governed by heteronormative capitalism and recognizes the suffering of departed generations that is caused by exploitative sexual and economic regimes. Billy does not attempt to restore pre-industrial socio-economic relations. Rather, he is 'in search of lost time' and reconfigures its ruins. He experiences flashes of uncolonized times and spaces in the ruins of pre-industrial times as he enjoys the company of Kes.¹⁷⁰

4.3.2 *BILLY ELLIOT*

In *Billy Elliot*, the object of nostalgia is configured around the deceased mother in the Elliot family. Each member of the family experiences this very personal loss

¹⁶⁹ Barthes, 180.

¹⁷⁰ French, "Kes – review."

differently. Masculinity becomes an important theme for mediating this experience. The hegemonic working-class masculinity of Billy's father is in danger because he does not have a wife and therefore he does not have partnership that allows the 'proper' performance of heterosexuality. Billy's brother, Tony, accuses his father of not being masculine enough. To fill the masculine authority gap in the family, Tony performs hegemonic masculinity by exercising power over Billy and their father. Billy, on the other hand, takes up the traditionally feminine responsibilities of social reproduction in their family, including preparing breakfast and caring for his aged grandmother. Both Billy and his father express overtly nostalgic sentiments about the loss of their mother and wife. They have strong relationships with the mother's belongings. For instance, Billy's father keeps his wife's clothes after her death, and Billy *plays* his mother's piano everyday, even though he does not know how to play piano. Additionally, Billy sometimes sees her in his hallucinations. Tony is nostalgic about his mother too, but he does not explicitly long for his mother. When he talks with his family, he implies that everything would be better if their mother was alive. They are all aware of the fact that the absence of the mother unsettles the happy life they once had.

Their life is also unsettled by new socio-political conditions, as the neoliberal government initiates a systematic attack of the working-classes. The political power of the working-classes is also diminished as a result of persistent attacks on unions. Thus the object of nostalgia outside the family is the working-classes' lost political power, and this loss also has consequences for the performance of masculinities. In Billy's town, the predominant working-class consists of male miners. A linear correlation is presupposed between being a male and a worker. Because the neoliberal socio-

economic policies institute downsizing and increasingly precarious working conditions for workers, the ability to challenge these policies directly influences working-class masculinity. The general sentiment among the workers in *Billy Elliot* seems to be shaped by a restorative nostalgia that aims to reinstitute the hegemonic working-class masculinity of ‘the good old days,’ when working-class men had the ability to negotiate their working conditions and were strong heads of heterosexual households.

In this context, the loss of the mother and the loss of class power play out simultaneously in the Elliot family, as we see in Tony’s aggressive masculine performances, Billy’s feminine performances, and Billy’s father’s conflicted positionality as publicly masculine (because of his class position) and privately feminine (when he shares the duties of social reproduction with Billy, and share’s Billy’s sense of loss.) The theme of nostalgia is evident in both the private and public spheres of social life. In short, *Billy Elliot* can be read as a nostalgic film in ways it depicts the particular spatio-temporal arrangements in which the working-classes had “a fair deal economically prior to their defeat in the mid-decade miners’ strikes”¹⁷¹ and a strong masculinity.¹⁷²

In addition to yearnings for the mother and the working-classes’ political power, Billy’s experiences of queer times and spaces also create nostalgic moments throughout the film. When Billy dances, he resists the masculinist ideals of his society, and rejects the assumption that he will become a precarious mineworker. Because the countryside

¹⁷¹ Weber, Cynthia. ““Oi. Dancing Boy!”: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Youth in *Billy Elliot*,” *Genders* 37, 2003. Retrieved from http://www.genders.org/g37/g37_weber.html on October 27, 2012.

¹⁷² Steve Blandford, *Film, Drama, and the Break-up of Britain*, (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007)

is increasingly colonized by the neoliberal privatization of public space, he cannot easily escape to the woods as Billy Casper did. But he is constantly represented as running through the town, as if he is fleeing the pervasive socio-sexual order. In the film, the juxtaposition of images of Tony and Billy running represents their desire to be free from the pressures of existing oppressive power regimes. Tony's action is informed by heroic working-class masculinist ideas, and he runs from the masculinist phallic forces of the state, such as horses, tanks, police batons and other weapons. As Tony does not change the masculinist terrain of the battle, he ends up beaten up by the state. In contrast, Billy's dance is informed by his mother's feminine heritage and his grandmother's lost dreams, and it is sealed with a kiss from his queer friend Michael. By performing a non-normative subjectivity, Billy is able to shift the landscape of his battle with heteronormative capitalism. He makes this shift by creating queer times and spaces in which he expresses his longing to belong to a society where he can reunite with his mother through their shared sensibilities, where he can fulfill his grandmother's dreams, and where he can accept his queer friend's kiss without being a 'poof.'

4.3.3 *BOYS VILLAGE*

Boys Village opens with several long shots of the village, which is located in the countryside. In these shots, we see the village from different angles in natural light. The richness of the colours and the closeness to nature give a picturesque quality to these scenes. We hear a piano solo in the background and then Kevin starts humming. When the picturesque beauty of the long shots merges with the simplicity and softness of the music, viewers experience a continual temporal shifting between 2011 - when the film

was released - and 1925 - when the Boy's Village was founded. This shifting at the outset leaves the audience uncertain about the time frame of the film. The visual aesthetics of the film do not allow the audience to temporally fix the meanings of Kevin's interactions with the teenage intruders and the village. It expands these relationships in history.

This ambiguity regarding time frame is further consolidated in later scenes. For instance, when viewers realize that Kevin has been in the village for an indeterminate period, they once again tackle the question of time: When did Kevin come to the village? In the morning of the same day? Or a day ago, or a decade ago, or he has always been there? This ambiguity is intensified when Kevin seems invisible to the teenage intruder before the fatal kiss. At this moment, Kevin's very existence becomes doubtful. During this moment of uncertainty, a flute, an organ, and some string instruments join the music. This musical complexity further consolidates the temporal ambiguity of the film. When the sound of the music is akin to that of a music box, the viewer is encouraged to go back in history due to the close association between music boxes and childhood. And when various instruments take up the music box tune, the music transports viewers back to the present, as this synthesis becomes the familiar music of our everyday lives. In *Boys Village*, we see nostalgia most clearly deployed as an aesthetic strategy in this oscillation of temporal frames that performs the nostalgic temporality in its form.

These artistic/aesthetic strategies contribute to the deeply nostalgic tone of *Boys Village*. This nostalgia operates in tandem with Kevin's queer ways of domesticating and inhabiting the village. Throughout the film, Kevin orders the village through a

queer sensibility, and in so doing he creates queer times and spaces. In these non-normative spatio-temporalities, he expresses his longing to belong to a world in which he does not have to be invisible to exist. One of the most poignant manifestations of this yearning is apparent when Kevin says to one of his dolls “[my family] will pick me up eventually.”

Nostalgia and queer times and spaces are interconnected in *Boys Village* because they stem from the same desire: to have a livable life that can exist beyond the heteronormative capitalist matrix. It seems that Kevin is nostalgic for the life he had before being exiled in the village. But, importantly, we are never sure if such a time existed. The visiting teenager also longs for a livable life, which cannot exist in his social world. Boy’s Village for the teenager symbolizes a nostalgic space in which he is free from the pressures of heteronormative capitalism.

I suggest that the scenes in which Kevin recreates and queers the normative spaces of education and religion are representations of Kevin’s desire to belong to the world from which he is expelled. The nostalgia represented in these scenes cannot be placed into the restorative/reflective nostalgia binary because Kevin wants to reconstruct those spaces, but not as they were. In other words, Kevin wants to understand and re-imagine the historical constitution of those normative spaces; rather than rejecting their legacy outright. And yet he eliminates the exclusiveness of those spaces in their reconstruction. Kevin inserts himself in those normative spaces through the deployment of his aesthetic and imaginative labour. In so doing, Kevin engages the heritage of normative spaces, institutions and practices and queers them.

In chapter two, I argue that Kevin and the teenager are the same person. Kevin represents the childhood of the teenager. This identification is configured through nostalgia in a dramatic encounter between Kevin and the teenager. Exiled in the village due to his unintelligible queer desire, Kevin kisses the teenager who comes back to the village to escape from the alienation he feels in the town. This encounter can be explained by the Freudian notion of *nachträglichkeit*¹⁷³ in which “an effect turned out to be its own cause.”¹⁷⁴ For instance, the teenager’s arrival in the village triggers his nostalgic memory of being a queer child, and he realizes that this part of his history is incarcerated in the village as Kevin. This new realization, which is symbolized by the kiss, renegotiates socio-sexual relations. Under the capitalist matrix his working-class laboring body has already been alienated, and after this new realization his queer body becomes jettisoned from the heteronormative matrix. As a result of this double violence, he dies. And yet as he becomes intelligible to the teenager, Kevin is freed, which is heralded by the beep of an old car from the 1930s, generating additional nostalgic feelings.

4.4 QUEER(ING) NOSTALGIA

In these films, queer times and spaces invoke a sense of nostalgia. This might be considered akin to reflective nostalgia, as it “lingers on ruins, the patina of time and

¹⁷³ *Nachträglichkeit* is translated as deferred action. It is “a memory arousing an effect which it did not arouse as an experience, because in the meantime the change [brought about] in puberty had made possible a different understanding of what was remembered.” Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud’s Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 171. n15.

¹⁷⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, (London: Verso, 2009) 38.

history, in the dreams of place and another time.”¹⁷⁵ However, I suggest that queer nostalgia is much more than reflective nostalgia, and becomes *queer* in-so-far as it is a constitutive element of queer times and spaces. Indeed, this form of nostalgia can potentially construct aesthetic political performances in anti-capitalist queer struggles, as happens in working-class queer boys’ everyday resistance. In this section, I explore the ways in which nostalgia can become a tactic of anti-capitalist queer critique.

Why is a contemporary queer film, like *Boys Village* so deeply nostalgic from beginning to end? I suggest that the nostalgic tone of the film represents the intensifying sense of nostalgia experienced in the world in which the film is set. As I explain in the first section of this chapter, nostalgia was initially about home, returning home. Longing to return home was exacerbated by the development of capitalism. In the contemporary moment of *Boys Village* nostalgia is related to ‘home’ once again. The ongoing economico-political crises of capitalist expansion, most recently illustrated by the global slump of 2007-8, suggest the profound precariousness of ‘home.’ Increasing levels of evictions, homelessness, rising unemployment rates, and severe poverty have shaken any secure sense of home for people across the global North. A recent study done on behalf of the European Commission states that “it is evident from the piecemeal data available that homelessness has risen across the EU as the economic - and financial - crisis has persisted.”¹⁷⁶ For instance, after the global slump homelessness has risen 20-25% in Greece, 19% in Portugal, 25% in rural areas and 11% in urban

¹⁷⁵ Boym, 41.

¹⁷⁶ Nicole Fondeville and Terry Ward, “Social Situation Observatory – Income distribution and living conditions” November 2011. p. 17 Retrieved from http://www.socialsituation.eu/research-notes/SSO%20RN8%20Homelessness_Final.pdf on April 12, 2013.

areas of the United Kingdom, and 9-10% in Belgium. The study states that “[t]he evidence also suggests that migrants, especially those from outside the EU, but not only, and young people have been disproportionately affected.”¹⁷⁷ Similarly the “Hunger and Homelessness Survey” of the United States Conference of Mayors indicates a considerable increase in homelessness.¹⁷⁸ According to this report, “19 of the 25 cities reported an increase in homelessness from 2007. More specifically, 16 cities reported an increase in the number of homeless families.”¹⁷⁹ As in the European Union, homelessness is not experienced equally among the citizens of the USA. 42% of the new homeless are African-Americans (compared to 11% of the general population), 13% are Hispanic (compared to 9% of the general population), 4% are Native-Americans (compared to 1% of the general population), 19% of them are the victims of domestic violence, and 2% of them are HIV positive (compared to 0.4% of the general population).¹⁸⁰ Additionally, “child homelessness is increased by 38% during recession era.”¹⁸¹

Homelessness, when understood at a very material level as being devoid of a regular dwelling, is produced by the systematic violence of capitalism. Homelessness

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ The United States Conference of Mayors, “Hunger and Homelessness Survey: A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America’s Cities, A-25 City Survey,” December 2008. Retrieved from http://usmayors.org/pressreleases/documents/hungerhomelessnessreport_121208.pdf on April 12, 2013.

¹⁷⁹ The National Coalition for the Homeless, “How Many People Experience Homelessness?” July 2009. Retrieved from http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/How_Many.html on April 12, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ The National Center on Family Homelessness, “1.6 Million Children Homeless in America,” December 13, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/media/172.pdf> on April 12, 2013.

creates “widespread nostalgia for a condition of being ‘at home’ in society”¹⁸² because to be at home is usually “perceived as a safe and familiar space, be it a haven or shelter, where people can relax, retreat and care”¹⁸³ under the alienating social relations of capitalism. Can one then ask whether the queer, aesthetic, political goal of nostalgia is to rebuild the home? Nostalgia in relation to the loss of home might raise collective political consciousness about the necessity of anti-capitalist struggle. Yet, to stop at this point would lead to restorative nostalgia in which home becomes an idealized object of the past that must be reconstructed at all costs. Home is closely aligned with the heterosexual family, which is enshrined “as the source of love, affection, and emotional security, the place where our need for stable, intimate human relationship is satisfied,”¹⁸⁴ which are mediated through capitalist ideology and property relations. Therefore, to paraphrase Marx, home might be perceived as “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions”¹⁸⁵ for some people. Nevertheless, to attempt to rebuild this family unit would ultimately consolidate heteronormativity that operates in tandem with capitalism, and to consolidate heteronormativity as a means to fight capitalism is then clearly a farce.

¹⁸² Quoted in Jan Willem Duyvendak, *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 9.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 27.

¹⁸⁴ John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983) 108.

¹⁸⁵ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction” (1844) Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm> on April 12, 2013.

As the primary space of the heteronormative family unit, home is constituted through the exclusion of the queer. Traditionally queer persons “who betray the reproductive prerogatives of the ‘home’”¹⁸⁶ become homeless by the very act of pronouncing their desire within the heteronormative matrix. One could argue that they become diasporic subjects; Kevin, Billy Casper and Billy Elliot are diasporic subjects as they create and live in queer times and spaces beyond the heterosexualized spaces of home. Living with a profound longing, diasporic subjects “mobilize the questions of past, memory and nostalgia”¹⁸⁷ to carve out a space in which they can make meanings for their life in diaspora, like Kevin does in *Boy’s Village*. As Dina Georgis writes, “[d]iaspora marks the end of an easy relationship to homeland”¹⁸⁸ and history. Queer diasporic subjects do not evoke “an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history”¹⁸⁹ as in restorative nostalgia. “What is remembered through ... the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles.”¹⁹⁰ An anti-capitalist queer reading practice deploys nostalgia as a means to analyse the contradictions of the normative

¹⁸⁶ Andil Gosine, “Fobs, Banana Boy, and the Gay Pretenders: Queer Youth Navigate Sex, ‘Race,’ and Nation in Toronto, Canada” in Eds. Maureen FitzGerald and Scott Rayter, *Queerly Canadian: An Introductory Reader in Sexuality Studies*, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc, 2012), 502.

¹⁸⁷ Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005) 4.

¹⁸⁸ Dina S. Georgis, “Cultures of Expulsion: Memory, Longing and the Queer Space of Diaspora,” *New Dawn: Journal of Black Canadian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2006) Retrieved from <http://dawn.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/dawn/article/view/4998/1832> on April 12, 2013.

¹⁸⁹ Gopinath 2005, 4.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

spaces “from which [a queer subject] is perpetually excluded or denied existence.”¹⁹¹ Thinking through the conditions of existence of diasporic queer subjects reveals the heteronormative violence embedded in home. In doing so, an anti-capitalist queer reading that is informed by nostalgia goes beyond the most immediate meaning of homelessness, as lacking a permanent dwelling.

Nostalgia, then, can offer a new way of negotiating history and space for queer subjects. I propose that this is why themes of nostalgia and queer times and spaces emerge simultaneously in these films. In a world littered with the corpses of those who are unintelligible in the heteronormative capitalist matrix¹⁹² (the teenager Kevin’s corpse and the decomposed human skull that the child Kevin holds in his hand), queers suffer from the violence of the normative world, and queerness “lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing,” and eventually it leads us to “the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”¹⁹³ Nostalgia, “as a search for placement and belonging, an attempt to produce meaning and value ... out of the archives of the past,”¹⁹⁴ becomes a crucial part of this queer journey to another world where each and every *body* enjoys a livable

¹⁹¹ Gayatri Gopinath, “Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion,” in eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Casteñeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller, *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003) 151.

¹⁹² Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009) 1.

¹⁹³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York and London: New York university Press, 2009) 1.

¹⁹⁴ Annamarie Jagose, “Hollywood Homosexuals: An Interview with Brett Farmer,” *Genders*, No. 33 (2001) Retrieved from http://www.genders.org/g33/g33_jagose.html on April 12, 2013.

life. Billy Casper, Billy Elliot, and Kevin all feel the stifling violence of heteronormative capitalism, and therefore create non-normative spatio-temporal particularities that they renegotiate through redemptive longing. Billy Casper and Billy Elliot renegotiate the damaged life of their pasts by using queer times and spaces and by fulfilling the dreams of their departed ancestors.

A part of the queer journey, nostalgia can become queer. Here nostalgia moves beyond binary oppositions, and instead “lies somewhere between the private and the public, between both speakable and unspeakable history,”¹⁹⁵ between old and new, between personal and collective history, between both the body and the mind, between dream and reality, between home and diaspora. Additionally, nostalgia incorporates a queer temporality by rejecting the linear conception of time. Like queer time and space, it oscillates between the past and the present. It disrupts the linear flow of time by invoking the images from the past. Billy Elliot’s dance is an example of these sudden disruptions. Billy does not dance according to a structured choreography; rather, he begins dance with classical ballet figures, then switches to boxing numbers.

Despite nostalgia’s relationship to the past, “its burning impulse is utopian.”¹⁹⁶

As Fredric Jameson writes:

Utopias do not embody the future but rather help us to grasp the limits of our images of the future, and indeed our impossibility of imagining a radically different future. Utopia ... is the radical disturbance of our sense of history and the disruption whereby we approach a thought of

¹⁹⁵ Moore, 10.

¹⁹⁶ Moore, 4.

the radical or absolute break with our own present and our own system.¹⁹⁷

Therefore, utopia can be imagined through queer nostalgia because “queer is radically anticipatory; it holds out a promise, a utopian aspiration, and occupies a time out-of-joint.”¹⁹⁸ But nostalgia and queer’s futurity is different from the reproductive and liberal futurity of heteronormative capitalism. Heteronormative capitalist futurity does not properly engage history. It selfishly asks for the self-sacrifice of the oppressed, and its own interests always come first. For instance, when liberal LGBT slogans assert that “it gets better” in relation to bullying at schools, they simply ask queer students to wait until their university experience, and suspend their lives for years. Or when heteronormative capitalist futurity says, “workers in the sweatshops in the global South are at least making money, if we didn’t do business there they wouldn’t be making any money,” it implies that if they do not die under the precarious working conditions of the sweatshops, and future generations continue to work in these conditions, then at some point in the distant future they will live prosperously. Queer nostalgic futurity, to be sure, rejects these kinds of futurity, yet it does not abandon the notion.¹⁹⁹ Being

¹⁹⁷ Fredric Jameson, “A New reading of Capital,” *Meditations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group*. 25.1, (Fall 2010): 13.

¹⁹⁸ Michael O’Rourke, “The Afterlives of Queer Theory,” *Continent*. 1.2 (2011): 103.

¹⁹⁹ While the anti-relational tendency of queer theory (e.g. Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman) argues the necessity of abandoning futurity altogether, the relational tendency of queer theory (e.g. Judith Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz) acknowledges the crucial importance of futurity for a queer movement. For a discussion of these positions see Juana María Rodríguez, “Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 2011. Volume 17. Number 2-3: 331-348; Teresa

discontent with the present, nostalgia draws attention to the past, and a queer examination critically engages with history to interfere with “a contemporary moment in which ‘there is no alternative’ seems if anything an even more potent alibi than it was twenty-five or thirty years ago,”²⁰⁰ and therefore to make a better present-future for Friday’s grandchildren.

Queer nostalgia, then, is an aesthetic political performance that struggles against “the erasure of spaces for expression”²⁰¹ under normative sexual and economic regimes. This performance might be used in visual arts more effectively because, as Alexandra Juhasz asserts, “nostalgia plus video allows for a refiguring of time.”²⁰² To play with time is easier in films as it is “the physical substance of film itself”²⁰³ and therefore “is precisely as plastic, malleable, tactile.”²⁰⁴ The director and writer of *Boys Village*, Till Kleinert provides an eloquent example of the malleability of the time when he makes constant temporal shifts in the ruins of Boy’s Village. As “ruins stand as the evidence of time’s wear, as remnants from a distant past, as the site ... of loss,”²⁰⁵ they allow the past and present violence of heteronormative capitalism to be represented in relation to

de Lauretis, “Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of A Future,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 2011. Volume 17. Number 2-3: 243-263.

²⁰⁰ Kevin Floyd, “Queer Principle of Hope,” *Meditations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group*. 25.1: 107-113. (Fall 2010) p. 103.

²⁰¹ Irene Dioli, “Back to a Nostalgic Future: The Queroslav Utopia,” *Sextures*. Volume 1. Issue 1. Pp. 24-42. p. 39.

²⁰² Alexandra Juhasz, “Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology and Queer Archive Activism,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12:2, 2006, Pp. 319-328. p.321.

²⁰³ Quoted in Moore, 5.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Moore, 67.

one another. By taking up and re-signifying tropes of nostalgia, Kleinert provides a layered and affectionate engagement with the spaces of queer childhood, and this aesthetic, political, and queer work opens up possibilities for more liveable lives for all.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I developed an anti-capitalist queer reading of *Kes*, *Billy Elliot* and *Boys Village* to analyze how shifts in the global economy shape the representation of working class children's immediate bodily experience of the world and its inhabitants. In particular, *Boys Village* gave me an opportunity to illustrate how bourgeois economic and political interests affect the spaces in which desire is enacted and the recognition of working-class queer children is experienced. I also demonstrate how the recognition of this desire is bound to death in a heteronormative capitalist matrix, and the ways in which a queer child's queer-nostalgic engagements with this matrix open up possibilities for transforming normative and exclusionary social landscapes. In other words, I investigated how *Boys Village* re-imagines the spatial, sexual, classed and gendered relations of childhood in the context of the detritus of neoliberalism represented in the actual ruins of the Miner's Welfare District Committee Seaside Camp. In so doing, I drew attention to the fact that, depending on the specificity of the situation, the economic might reveal itself in sexual and sensuous terms.

Despite the invaluable contributions made by many scholars to the fields of sociology and queer studies, most of their work overlooks the intersection of economic and material fields in the analysis of cultural productions. Indeed, queer cultural studies has predominantly been preoccupied with the sexual and its political connotations. This one-dimensional cultural analysis has resulted in a gap: the absence of the economic in queer cultural studies. I addressed this gap through an analysis of three cultural

productions. In this project, I analyzed the multi-layered complexities among the sexual, economic, historical, and geographical spheres of social life as they are represented in *Kes*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Boys Village*. By teasing out these complexities and articulations, I brought the sexual and the economic into closer conversation. Relatedly, by drawing on anti-capitalist theoretical tools to analyze visual cultural productions, I integrated the economic more deeply into queer cultural studies. Therefore, my thesis contributes to the fields of queer studies, sociology and economic theory by illuminating the often-neglected connections between the sexual and economic. I achieved this in a nuanced analysis of the lives of working-class children in a context where normative socio-sexual relations police the boundaries of ‘liveable’ lives.

I shed light on the relationship between sexual and economic regimes in three ways. First, I extended and complicated queer reading strategies by incorporating an anti-capitalist critique that emphasizes that “the regulation of sexuality [is] systematically tied to *the mode of production* proper to the functioning of political economy.”²⁰⁶ This incorporation has methodological consequences as it offers a new strategy of reading and interpreting cultural texts. For instance, my anti-capitalist queer readings of *Kes*, *Billy Elliot* and *Boys Village* investigated the representations of heteronormativity and capitalism in relation to each other, not independent of one another. In so doing, I was able to capture the violence perpetuated by these normative regimes in their ever-changing and complex nature.

²⁰⁶ Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural,” *Social Text*, No. 52/53: *Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender*, Pp. 265-277 (Autumn-Winter, 1997), p. 272. Emphasis in original.

Second, I explored representations of heteronormative capitalist subjectivity from the vantage point of non-normative subjectivities by juxtaposing Robinson Crusoe with Kevin in the contemporary film, *Boys Village*. This juxtaposition has epistemological implications as it provides a novel way of knowing social reality. An African proverb reminds us the importance of critical epistemologies: “until lions start writing down their own stories, the hunters will always be the heroes.” Through my analysis, I challenged the mainstream understanding that economy is a neutral sphere that is divorced from the racialized, gendered and sexualized processes of social life. By telling the stories of Friday’s grandchildren, I demonstrated how white, capitalist, colonialist, heterosexual Robinson subjectivity cannot express the richness of human experience. Rather, it distorts the relationships of domination and exploitation that render people’s lives unlivable.

Third, I offered a deepened spatio-temporal understanding of queerness by deploying nostalgia in a new way. Through this deployment, I indicated that queer modalities of being are not bound to the here-and-now, unlike normative social ontologies. Even though it exists in the here-and-now, queerness also refers to the there-and-then through nostalgic negotiations of time and space. This utopic characteristic of queerness highlights its fundamental openness to various possibilities. In this open futuristic time and space, queer film engage with history in a nostalgic fashion. It embodies the *algos* of those who suffered from unlivable and impossible lives, and strives to make a *nostos* for them by frustrating the straightjacketing of normative matrices of power.

Sexuality is usually thought to be a deeply personal subject, whereas economy is often conceived as an inherently structural matter. Therefore, political activisms concerned with sexuality have been pigeonholed as identity politics that only seek cultural recognition. On the other hand, political activisms concerned with economy have been understood as class politics that seek structural transformation. An interconnected analysis of sexual and economic regimes demonstrates the limits of this dichotomous thinking about political activism; it allows us to produce more fruitful ways of thinking and acting, which we call praxis. As I demonstrated throughout my thesis, queer times and spaces offer spatio-temporal arrangements that can accommodate modes of politics that go beyond the rigid matrix of the identity/class politics dichotomy. In queer times and spaces, working-class children challenge the straightjacketing of normative sexual and economic regimes. Moreover, they are able to create alternative worlds by performing non-normative subjectivities.

It seems to me that recent social movements around the globe also attempt to go beyond the binary of identity/class politics. The participants of contemporary social movements, including student protests in Chile and Montréal, the Arab Spring, the European Summer and the Occupy Protests, have been mobilized through different classes, races, genders, sexualities and religions. Their demands are not only about a single aspect of their identities. Rather, they are fighting for changes that would affect multiple regimes of power, including sexuality and economy. Ethnographic studies of these movements might reveal the ways in which complex relations of different power regimes are sustained by being mediated through one another, and what new modes of politics are being created and enacted to integrate seemingly independent spheres of

social life. My analysis here might inform such ethnographic studies, as queer times and spaces would be useful conceptual tools for critical sociological investigations.

In this project, I examined only three different modes of creating queer times and spaces. The common feature in producing queer times and spaces was *relationality*. First, in *Kes*, Billy Casper produced queer times and spaces through his affective relationship with a kestrel that was a remnant of pre-industrial relations. This relationship queered normative sexual and economic regimes, and illustrated a version of nostalgic solidarity by re-enacting how the human and the animal might build connection that challenge alienation in economic and hetero-familial relations. Second, Billy Elliot created queer times and spaces by enacting a form of bodily performance that contradicted heteronormative working-class masculinity. In other words, he passionately performed ballet, which was unauthorized by the normative sexual and economic regimes. In the embodied practice of non-authorization, he fought against the forces of heteronormative capitalism, and accomplished the creation a world including an alternative family and profession for a working-class boy. Third, in *Boys Village*, Kevin produced queer times and spaces through his aesthetical relationship with his surroundings. In the longing to belong to a non-normative world, Kevin used his aesthetic labour as a queer-political strategy to make a world where he could be intelligible. As a result, he was able to carve out a social space for his non-Robinson-like subjectivity, even in the ruins of neoliberalism.

A sociological study focused on recent social movements could also inquire as to whether or not these movements create queer spatio-temporal arrangements that are not locked into the heteronormative-reproductive and capitalist-productive matrices. If

so, what kinds of relationality enable them to produce queer times and spaces? Do these modes include affective/sensuous relations, unauthorized embodied relations, aesthetic relations with the self, the other, and objects that I found in the representational realm? What other modes of relationality have been offered and used by the participants of these movements to achieve a political goal? In addition to asking these questions, such investigations should engage with the sociology of time and space and spatial theories to reveal the relationships between normative sexual and economic regimes and the constitution and regulation of time and space.

To conclude, in this thesis I deployed an anti-capitalist queer reading practice to investigate the representations of how heteronormative capitalism systematically operates to exterminate the life possibilities of working-class children. My analysis highlighted how these children resist the forces of normalization by creating queer times and spaces through affective and sensuous engagements with others, performing unauthorized embodied practices, and aesthetic strategies.

As they create queer times and spaces despite conditions of abject poverty, police surveillance and the ruins of neoliberalism, Billy Casper, Billy Elliot and Kevin taught me the importance of not abandoning the anti-capitalist queer struggle even in the worst times. Their stories resonate with a strong sense of hope and faith in what queer can offer to a future in which everyone enjoys liveable lives. They also demonstrated that this struggle is the common fight of Friday's grandchildren, cutting across all classes, races, genders, and sexualities. Therefore, I hope my thesis has contributed to this common struggle against heteronormative capitalism. Maya Angelou

has already written the last lines of this thesis when she wrote her famous poem “Still I Rise:”

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

...

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

...

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

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